

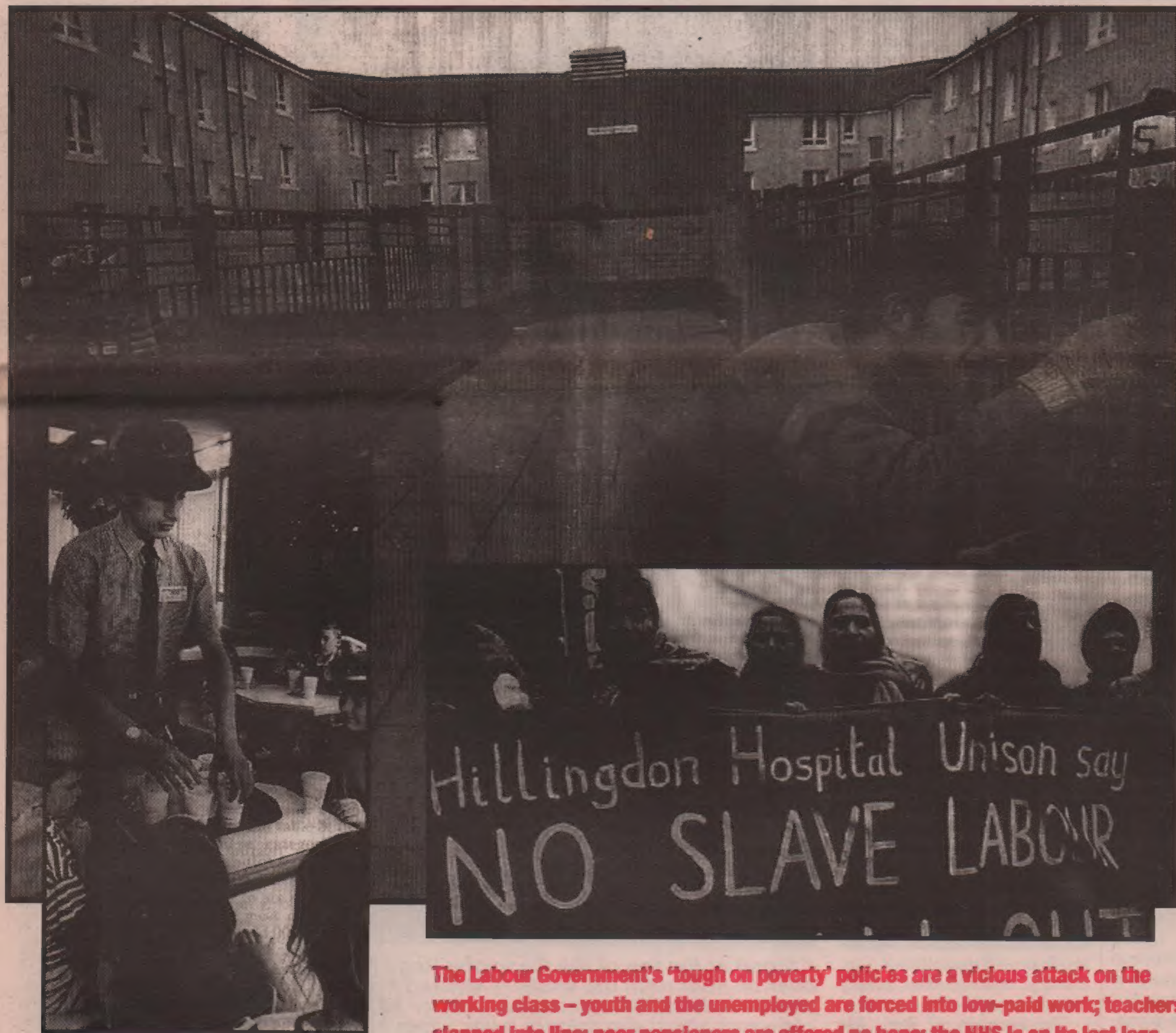
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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Labour Party cracks the whip



The Labour Government's 'tough on poverty' policies are a vicious attack on the working class – youth and the unemployed are forced into low-paid work; teachers slapped into line; poor pensioners are offered no hope; the NHS is on its last legs through lack of funding.

FIGHT WELFARE- TO-POVERTY PAY

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IRA announces new ceasefire

As we go to press, the IRA has announced a new ceasefire beginning at noon, Sunday 20 July. This followed a statement by Gerry Adams, who said that the commitments which allowed the original ceasefire to be called, and which the previous Tory government had reneged on, now appeared to be back in place. Most significant were comments allegedly made by Northern Ireland Secretary of State Mo Mowlam that a London-Dublin paper on decommissioning would not be amended to guarantee paramilitary arms would be handed over during talks.

Following the original ceasefire in August 1994, we argued that:

'The struggle is not over. The economic, political and social problems which keep forcing the national struggle onto the political agenda still remain. The Six Counties is a sectarian statelet. British imperialism has not left Ireland. The political prisoners are still in gaol. The nationalist working class faces massive economic deprivation and discrimination with unemployment levels more than twice that of the loyalist working class. Should the Sinn Fein leadership be drawn into any proposed "New Ireland" Administration, in the Six Counties or 26 Counties and have conferred on it the status of privileged bourgeois parliamentarians, it will find itself in conflict with the nationalist working class - those people of no property who have always been a bedrock of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland.' (FRFI 121, October/November 1994)

Has anything changed in the intervening period? The answer is no, as the events surrounding the Drumcree march on Garvaghy Road on 6 July confirmed. They show that all British governments, Labour or Tory, are not to be trusted. These events form the background to the new ceasefire.

Mowlam had been engaged in a series of talks with representatives of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Association over the Orange march. These were later exposed as a sham when a leaked document from the Northern Ireland Office showed that Mowlam and the RUC had agreed over two weeks before the march that it would go down the Garvaghy Road. Mowlam attempted to justify the actions of the Labour government in forcing the Orange march down the Garvaghy Road by blaming the 'intransigence of both sides'. This facade of hand-wringing impotence cannot hide the fact that the Labour government will do all in its power to defend the interests of British imperialism in the north of Ireland, and back Unionist interests, when necessary, with force.

In the week that followed Drumcree over 2,500 plastic bullets were fired at nationalist protesters as all over the north people came out to voice their anger and opposition to the Orange marches. One 14-year-old, Gary Lawlor, was left fighting for his life in a coma after being hit in the head by a plastic bullet. In the afternoon and evening of 6 July 15,000 people demonstrated in west Belfast, 10,000 in Derry and 4,000 in Newry. Martin McGuinness called for people to take to the streets: 'the message is clear, the only place to be when demanding justice and equality is on the streets, confronting your opponent'. Large numbers of young people engaged in actions to defend their areas against the RUC and army. As one woman quoted in *Republican News* said, 'they [the youth] are a credit to our communities for taking on the might of the British army and RUC and forcing them out of our districts, just like they did in the early 1970s'. Armed actions by the IRA increased in the days after Drumcree. As 12 July approached, with the threat of Orange marches down the Lower Ormeau Road in Belfast and through other nationalist districts, mass opposition increased. Shops and businesses on the Lower Ormeau Road were going to shut down on 12 July and similarly in Derry. It was this growing tide of opposition to the Orange marches and growing instability within the north of Ireland which led RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan to say he could not guarantee the safety of Orange marchers and forced the Orange Order to re-route four marches away from nationalist areas.

The Orange Order backdown created confusion and division within loyalist ranks. This opened up political space in which the British government, in alliance with the newly-elected Fianna Fail government backed by powerful US interests, could make a concession to the Sinn Fein leadership over the issue of decommissioning, despite vociferous loyalist opposition. It was this concession that made the new ceasefire possible.

However, on the ground nothing has really changed. The Six Counties remains a sectarian statelet. There can be no internal settlement that guarantees the rights of the nationalist working class. Blair has made it clear there will not be a united Ireland in his lifetime, while Adams states that 'Sinn Fein will be guided by our aim of a united Ireland'. The aim of Labour is to neutralise the revolutionary traditions of republicanism through the talks process. Adams argues that through the talks they can fulfil them.

Whatever takes place during the talks process, the nationalist working class will judge the process by what is happening on the streets and estates, on the treatment of Republican prisoners, on progress to end deprivation and discrimination, and on the conduct of the forces of occupation - the British Army and the RUC. In short, on whether the sectarian statelet is being dismantled.

As socialists in Britain, we stand fully behind the struggles of the nationalist working class in the north of Ireland and demand:

Britain out of Ireland! Prisoners out of gaol! Troops out now!

IRELAND: Drumcree march eye-witness report

'The people felt utterly betrayed'

Gora Ebrahim is a South African MP. During the liberation struggle against apartheid he was Foreign Secretary of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and in this capacity gave a number of interviews to FRFI. In July, he was invited by Sinn Fein to be an International Observer over the weekend of the Drumcree march. In transit back to South Africa, he described events to FRFI.

FRFI: How did this visit come about?

GE: Let me start by saying that South Africans of many political persuasions are interested in developments in northern Ireland. The Irish supported our struggle and we believe that there are experiences which we have had which could be useful for them. As a result, a high level delegation visited northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and, about a month ago, we invited the various northern Ireland political parties to South Africa. I must say we were disappointed at the manner in which the Unionist delegates acted: the intolerance they showed - refusing to meet the other side or even be addressed together in the same room.

This time of year is the marching period in northern Ireland. And this year, because there is a new government in the United Kingdom and a relatively new government in Ireland, there was optimism that perhaps there would be a different situation from previous years. I have been dealing with Ireland on behalf of the South African Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs and was invited by Sinn Fein to witness events during this period.

I arrived at the Garvaghy Road at 6pm on Saturday 5 July.

What was the atmosphere like?

There were a lot of people there; meetings had taken place and there were a lot of observers: from the United States, Canada, the south of Ireland and the European Parliament. On everyone's lips were the questions: Will the march take place? Will the British government stop the march or will they allow it to go through, or will they simply force it through?

The Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, had promised the Garvaghy Road residents she would inform them personally of the decision but by 8pm there was no such decision. The waiting process went on until midnight when there were reports that two trucks with barbed wire had moved to the church. The assumption was that they were going to cordon off the church and there would not be a march after all. This was taken in good faith by the Garvaghy Road residents, so we were told to go and sleep and that if anything happened we would be woken up or would hear the siren. People were lulled into thinking it was possible that the march would not take place. Radio and televi-

sion reports were that no decision had yet been taken, that there were still discussions. Some were saying that these were not eleventh hour but twelfth hour discussions!

At 3am the siren went off. I walked out of where I was stay-

throwing stones and after a while petrol bombs. And one could understand their anger.

At 6am I went into the house to watch Sky News. Then I made my way to the community hall in the centre of Garvaghy Road. People had gathered for

anger by throwing stones at the police.

The march took about ten minutes to go past. I think they decided to march very quickly! Then, as the police and soldiers began withdrawing, the people really began to vent their anger by stoning the retreating policemen and soldiers. They hijacked a few vehicles and set them alight.

The leader of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Association told me they were terribly disappointed and that under no circumstances would they have any further discussions with Mo Mowlam. They felt the authorities had once more given in to the Orange Order. They did not believe, and nor did I, that the decision was taken purely by the Chief of Police. It had to be taken higher up; it was a political decision. That view was vindicated by a leaked document which clearly states there was consensus between the Secretary of State, the Chief of the RUC and the Commissioner of Parades that whatever happened the parade would take place.

The observers felt that leaving such a decision to the RUC Chief Constable, when the vast majority of nationalists have no faith whatsoever in the RUC, would at the outset have been viewed with suspicion. But the way that it was carried out made the suspicions much greater. It was also felt that Mo Mowlam, who had earlier built some sort of rapport with the people of that area, has largely destroyed her credibility.

After the march it was decided that we, the observers, should go to a major rally in west Belfast, so we left. I was taken straight to Ormeau Road where someone had fired at the RUC. The place was cordoned off and, although I was an observer, I was not allowed through. A march of 10,000 people had already taken place along the Falls Road and the rally was addressed by Sinn Fein leaders.

That night there were a number of incidents. Over 100 vehicles were hijacked and buses were set on fire. The reaction of the people was very strong. A slogan I heard in the march was 'New Labour - no change'. I would say also for us as South Africans, we had hoped that the new Labour government, which would not be dependent on the Unionists to stay in power, would at least appear to be more even-handed to the two communities.

When I was in the Garvaghy Road that night I understood what nationalists mean when they say: 'We are second class citizens in this country'. Their rights, their views, their concerns don't mean anything, whereas for the other side, the right is upheld to march through a predominantly nationalist area, not because it is holy soil but because they want to make a political point. It was a political march and a political decision was made to allow it to go ahead.



ing and literally walked into a military invasion. I saw police, soldiers, jeeps, armoured cars move into Garvaghy Road and the side streets. I saw people seated in the square in Garvaghy Road, without giving any provocation, and police and soldiers come and forcibly remove them. People were very

an open air mass because no-one could leave the area; it was all cordoned off.

The people felt utterly betrayed because a promise had been made that the decision would be conveyed and no decision had been conveyed. What they saw was just an army invasion of their territory, and



'I stood at the top of the Garvaghy Road for over an hour until the soldiers started firing plastic bullets. One youngster - 14 or 15 years old - was about ten meters away when he was hit. So, we all went to pick him up. They were just firing anywhere.'

angry; you could hear them shouting. Then sporadic throwing of stones at the police and army began.

How many people were gathered from the community?

At least 1,000 and as time went on more came. I stood at the top of the Garvaghy Road for over an hour until the soldiers started firing plastic bullets. One youngster - 14 or 15 years old - was about ten meters away when he was hit. So, we all went to pick him up. They were just firing anywhere. People were angry and some were

to allow the Orange Order to march for 15 minutes, they were imprisoned in that area for over 12 hours. They could not even attend church so the priests from different churches came there and held open air mass.

Around 1pm the Orange Order march took place. A residents' meeting had decided they would protest by banging tins and whatever they could to make a noise. It was quite deafening. Stewards stood between the people and the police but despite that there were incidents of people showing their

Labour's dilemma

The *Daily Mail* was essentially right when it said, 'Truly there is something Tory about this first Labour Budget for a generation.' Labour will continue with the attempt to build a competitive economy, like its Tory predecessors, through deregulated labour markets and cut-backs and privatisation of state welfare. Non-wage 'labour' costs to capital will be reduced, forcing millions of working class people to face ever lower levels of social protection. The problem with this is that it will almost certainly place great strains on the coalition of forces which united to drive the Conservatives from power and elect Labour.

In a recent article, David Marquand describes that coalition as encompassing 'virtually the whole of the professional class, large swathes of corporate-sector management, what is left of the old, organised, upper-working-class Labour interest that the party came into existence to serve, and most of the "new" Thatcherite working class that swung to the right in the late-1970s and early 1980s.' All these beneficiaries of the first Thatcher governments are not united by anything positive, but by fear of the political and social upheavals of a continuing neo-liberal offensive. They do not wish to reverse the process but to call a halt to it.

But, as Marquand points out, this is not possible. The brutal logic of the global market-place entails 'relentless and disruptive changes in virtually every sphere of social life'. His solution, however, is equally unrealistic. It is that Labour, which differs from Thatcherite Tories in accepting that Britain can only play a significant role in world affairs through close involvement in the European Union, should take a further step to embrace and defend the European social model from destruction at the hands of a rampant global capitalism (*The Guardian* 16 July 1997).

Marquand does not understand why Blair's Labour Party is now in power and moreover acceptable to the ruling class. The representatives of British multinational capital are actually at the centre of Labour's coalition. They are there because, unlike the discredited and divided Tories, Labour is in a better position, as economic conditions deteriorate, to prevent an alliance against capitalism developing between the poor working class and sections of the middle class threatened with proletarianisation. Labour's dilemma is how to hold this coalition together in economic circumstances and with economic policies which must blow it apart. Hence the Budget speech rhetoric of urging 'every business to play its part in a national crusade to equip this country for the future by taking on young unemployed men and women', while in reality attempting to force young people into dead-end jobs at poverty pay. Or the hollow call: 'It is time for the welfare state to put opportunity again into people's hands', while slashing social provision and removing basic social protection from millions of working class people. The Budget rhetoric soon recedes when confronted with the harsh reality of the British economy and Labour's economic and social policies for dealing with it.

LABOUR'S FIRST BUDGET

reinforcing unequal Britain

The political process in contemporary Britain seldom raises itself above the sound bites thought necessary to manipulate and deceive the public. The first Labour budget carefully followed this pattern. This budget, Chancellor Gordon Brown informed us, would 'ensure Britain is equipped to rise to the challenge of the new and fast changing global economy'. It would do this, unlike previous budgets, without pursuing the short term interests of the few. His budget - a 'people's budget for Britain's future' - would advance the long-term interests of the many. But, as DAVID YAFFE explains below, all this bluster is designed to conceal the harsh reality. Brown's Labour budget offers only contradictory proposals to tackle the economic problems facing Britain's parasitic and crisis-ridden economy while reinforcing inequality in an increasingly polarised class society.

The real budget

Public spending will be cut. In 1997/8 the control total will be £200m lower than under the Tory plans of November 1996 and unchanged from those for 1998/9. The budget deficit will be continually reduced throughout Labour's term of office and three different possible plans were outlined for doing this. The first allowed only a 0.75% growth in real spending a year for the three years from 1999/2000 (zero, if Labour's new higher forecast for inflation is used), leading to a fall in public spending to 36.7% of GDP in 2002, the lowest level since 1966. Other projections include rises in spending of 1.5% and 2.25% respectively. These will also bring public spending levels as a proportion of GDP below the levels of the last Tory government. Labour's plans for public spending are far harsher than the Tories achieved during their 18 years of power. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has estimated that if public spending had continued at the Tories's 18-year trend rate of growth, then it would be up to £35bn higher at the end of this parliament than under Labour.

A great deal has been made of the £2.2bn extra spending taken from contingency reserves for increased spending on health and education. Last year the National Health Service was left with a deficit of at least £350m. The extra £1.2bn found for 1998/9 represents a real growth of only 2.25% - less than the 3% average yearly growth attained over 18 years of Tory governments. This simply papers over the cracks. The baseline figure for NHS spending will not rise and the health service faces a 3% cut in its budget for 1999-2000. Spending on private health care has doubled from 5% to 10% of public health spending since 1979. Labour's present plans can only accelerate this process and leave millions of working class people without adequate health provision.

The £1bn addition to the local authorities' education budget should prevent the sacking of about 12,000 teachers and stop the growth of class sizes of more than 30 spreading from primary into secondary schools. It budgets for a 'modest' increase in teachers' pay. An extra £1.3bn from the windfall tax will begin to tackle the chronic neglect of school buildings, going some way towards the estimated £3.2bn backlog of repairs. For what is Labour's main priority area, this is hardly earth-shattering. Further increases in educa-



tion and health spending would appear to come from funds drawn from the national lottery.

All other government departments' and local authorities' expenditure is governed by Labour's rigid acceptance of previous Tory plans. Local authorities, faced with a real-term decrease in their budget, have warned the government that 'unacceptable' cuts to fire, police, highways and environmental protection and consumer budgets will need to be made this year.

Disciplining the poor

£3.5bn from the one-off £5.2bn windfall tax on the excess profits of the privatised utilities will be used to finance the Labour's much-trumpeted 'New Deal' Welfare to Work programme. This 'New Deal' is more draconian than that proposed by the Tories. The young unemployed will be offered four options under the scheme: working for a private sector employer, receiving a £60 a week subsidy for six months; voluntary work; joining an environmental task force or going on a training course. All benefit will be cut from those who 'unreasonably' refuse one of these options. Pregnant women, lone parents and those with long-term disabilities will lose up to 40% of their benefits if they refuse. A £75-a-week incentive will be given to employers who take on the long-term adult unemployed. Finally, lone parents who have not been in work

will be 'invited' by the employment service for a job interview and encouraged to find work and given help with childcare facilities. At the same time, no doubt as further 'encouragement', Labour will go ahead with Tory plans to cut the one parent family benefit of £6.30 a week and the £5.20 paid to single parents on Income Support.

A more detailed discussion of this programme appears elsewhere in this issue of FRFI. Its significance lies in Labour's determination to discipline and control the growing numbers of young people who increasingly reject and represent a potential threat to the social norms imposed by capitalist society. At the same time, drawing them into the workforce as cheap labour, even for short periods of time, serves the interests of capital, by pressurising the rest of the working class into accepting the ever worsening conditions at work at lower rates of pay. The lack of jobs for young people relates to the aggregate conditions of the economy not the lack of training and skills of young people. Capitalism cannot solve youth unemployment because it is no longer capable of creating sufficient long-term permanent jobs.

Keeping the middle classes sweet

The British economy is in the throes of an inflationary consumer boom. The housing market and the £35bn windfall pay-

outs from building society flotations will fuel it further. Yet New Labour stood by its promises not to increase direct taxes on the middle classes. The small rise in consumer taxes through increased duties on petrol, alcohol and cigarettes, the cut in mortgage interest tax relief to 10 per cent and the rise in stamp duty on houses above £250,000 will lower consumer spending by a mere £2bn. On average this is equivalent to a 1p increase on income tax. Yet the middle classes are subsidised by some £10bn each year through tax incentives on pensions, PEPs and TESSAs - equivalent to 5p on income tax. They are the biggest beneficiaries from building society payouts. The budget not only did not reduce these subsidies but announced their continuation through individual savings accounts based on the principle of PEPs and TESSAs to be introduced in 1999. New Labour knows it must hold together the coalition that put it into power, while it puts into place the draconian measures needed to discipline and control the most impoverished sections of the working class.

This political decision has economic consequences. While parts of the British economy are booming, large sections of manufacturing industry are stagnating. Unable to slow down the consumer boom by substantially higher taxes, Labour has to rely on a tighter monetary policy. The 'independent' Bank of England is keen to oblige and has raised interest rates three times over the last three months with devastating consequences for manufacturing industry, as the pound surges and exports become less competitive. The pound has risen over 30% against the DM and 24% against a basket of currencies since last August. In May manufacturing output fell by 1.1% and engineering output by 2.3%, the biggest monthly decline since production was disrupted by freezing weather in 1987. The situation will deteriorate as more interest rate rises become necessary to curb the consumer boom.

The real economy

Since 1980, the Chancellor informed us, Britain has invested a lower share of GDP than most other industrialised countries. For every £100 invested per worker in Britain, Germany has invested over £140, The US and France around £150 and Japan over £160. He intends to change this by developing a tax system which

encourages saving and which favours and rewards higher long term investment. So the main tax raising measure in the budget was the abolition of tax credits on advanced corporation tax (ACT) raising some £14bn over four years. Companies pay ACT when dividends are paid out. Shareholders get an equivalent credit and tax-exempt holders such as pension funds can claim repayment. Brown said he would abolish such credits because they encouraged companies to pay out dividends rather than reinvest profits. Yet the impact of this measure taking account of the 2% reduction in corporation tax was to increase taxation on the corporate sector by some £2bn a year. It is unlikely to encourage corporations and pensions to invest more in Britain.

While investment in Britain is stagnating - investment as a proportion of GDP has fallen continuously during the current economic upswing with manufacturing investment almost 13% below its 1990 peak - British investment abroad is booming. In 1993, following the 1990-92 recession, British investment overseas (direct and portfolio) at £101.9bn, was greater than the total capital investment in Britain at £94.2bn and more than eight times the investment in manufacturing industry. In 1996 even after the recovery in domestic investment and following a fall in portfolio investment abroad, British overseas investment was equivalent to 77.9% of total capital investment in Britain and nearly six times that invested in manufacturing industry.

Labour's budget offers no solution to Britain's economic problems. As economic conditions further deteriorate, and the economy stagnates, the Labour coalition will start to fall apart. For the first time in a number of years the opportunity will arise to build a new coalition of forces - a coalition which will have the impoverished working class at its core - this time against Labour and the capitalist system it fully supports. ■

Pensioners notes

Pensioners perhaps more than any other section of the population have found this cold wet Spring hard to take.

We were longing to turn off the heating and use the money saved to make some overdue purchases to replace worn-out equipment and furniture. Now, the new Labour Government has made it clear that it will not help existing pensioners who have to rely on the miserable state pension. We are just getting poorer.

I only hope that our rally on 20 September will let us show our full strength. We need to give ourselves and our friends the message that we need decent pensions now - time is not on our side and for us to agree to wait would simply be used as an excuse to refuse others. We are not a poor Third World country and it's not the slightest use hesitantly pleading. The money is there - the question is who gets it? Do we want to see yet another handout to the rich? Don't let's soft-pedal - our claim is just.

Rene Waller

A bad deal for the unemployed

One of New Labour's five election pledges was to tackle unemployment by creating the right economic conditions for growth. Gordon Brown's budget revealed the much anticipated 'Welfare to Work' programme, and was heralded as a 'New Deal' by sections of the bourgeois media. DAVID HOWARTH exposes the reality.

The Welfare to Work programme will initially be paid for by £3 billion raised from the Windfall Tax on privatised utilities, spent over five years. The programme includes guaranteeing a choice to a quarter of a million 18-to-25-year-olds of:

- a private-sector job with a wage for six months, for which the employer gets a £60-a-week subsidy, a training organisation gets £750 for one-day-a-week training and the claimant receives a £400 grant;
- work with a voluntary organisation, for benefit plus a £400 grant;
- work with an environmental task force, for benefit plus a £400 grant;
- full-time education/training for one year on benefit.

This will be preceded by a four-month 'gateway' induction scheme to provide the claimant with education and social skills to prepare them for a job or placement.

In addition to this, 175,000 over-25s who have been unemployed for over two years, will be offered waged work in the private-sector with a £75-a-week subsidy for six months, and a further 10,000 will be able to take up full-time education/training on full benefit for one year.

Later on, a further £400 million from the Windfall Tax will be targeted on lone parents and people with disabilities.

These 'choices' are compulsory, backed up with sanctions. Pregnant women, lone parents



and those with long-term disabilities will lose 40% of their benefits, the long-term unemployed can reject one of the choices with 'good reason' (illness, having to travel excessive distances to work, having caring responsibilities or health and safety reasons) or face a 100% benefit sanction, as will the young unemployed, except they have very little chance of having a 'good reason' accepted.

This represents a further repressive attack on the unemployed, following the introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) scheme started by the Tories last October, which still applies to the rest of the unemployed. The JSA is also backed with up to 100% benefit sanctions, which like the Welfare to Work programme, is decided by Adjudi-

cation Officers, who so far have removed benefit from 25,000 claimants under JSA rules.

The 'New Deal' serves to force those who are in effect outside the labour market, back into it for two main reasons. Firstly, to 'make an impact on social exclusion', as Will Hutton preaches regularly, for fear of it leading to 'political extremes', by forcing on them the discipline of labour (or training). Secondly, to restructure and further fragment the workforce in the interests of capital to solve its deepening crisis. Government schemes for the unemployed only lead to around a 30% net increase in jobs, which if applied to the 435,000 initially targeted in the programme, will only reduce real unemployment - currently four million, according to a recent report by HSBC (the Midland

Bank parent group) - by less than 5%. It is accepted by the bourgeois media that employers will take on subsidised workers even though they would have taken on new workers anyway, and, further, that some employers will use the opportunity to replace existing workers by subsidised workers. They will thus create a larger mass of workers in the 'revolving door' labour market in which workers are shuffled between temporary jobs and spells on benefit. These people are recycled back onto the dole, but labelled as short-term unemployed, so they disappear from key statistics. The fact that throughout Labour's 18 years in opposition they rightly accused the Tories of fiddling the figures, only to conveniently use them once in government, exposes their rank hypocrisy and opportunism. The 'revolving door' labour market is the key to lowering wages, weakening the unions and removing rights to holiday pay, sick pay, redundancy payments etc.

This is the current employment situation:

- Since 1992 when the 'recovery' started, unemployment among youth and black people has risen. Black people suffer a rate of unemployment two and a half times that of white people.
- Over 20% of households with children have no workers (the highest figure in the European Union).
- 43% of all new jobs created between winter 1992-3 and autumn 1996 were part-time, and of full-time jobs created nearly half were on temporary contracts.
- Overall, one quarter of Britain's 28 million workforce is employed part-time.
- The relative gap between the highest and lowest earners is wider than in the 1890s.

Capital will escalate its attacks and this bodes ill for the whole of the working class unless it organises to resist.

Notes from the '90s

HOUSING

■ In a 'snap-shot survey' of the city's homeless, Nottingham Council discovered nine children under 16 sleeping rough in one week.

■ Thatcher's 'housing boom' is backfiring on the poor - a survey by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded, unsurprisingly, that negative equity hits low-income households hardest. Poorer households bought cheaper, smaller, poorer quality dwellings which subsequently fell most in value and these were often the same households most likely to suffer reduced earnings through unemployment. Only 58 per cent of households on the new estates surveyed in Luton and Bristol thought housing was a good investment, as opposed to 92 per cent in a 1993 survey of 'housing attitudes'.

RACISM

■ Two out of five people from ethnic minorities in Manchester have experience racial harassment in the last year, according to a MORI poll. Only 19% of these incidents were reported to the police.

■ Infamous sleaze-ridden Westminster Council's latest gimmick is 'exporting' its homeless asylum-seekers to hostels in Liverpool; supposedly squeaky-clean New Labour Camden is toying with the same idea.

POVERTY

■ The head of the Low Pay Commission, who will be responsible for setting the rate for the national minimum wage (likely to be somewhere between £3 and £4 per hour), earns £130,000 per annum as principal of the London Business School (around £60 an hour).

Nicki Jameson

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.*

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. *The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.*

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. *The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.*

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688. Website:
<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcg/frfi.htm>

British Airways tries union busting

British Airways is attempting to bust trade union organisation in its drive to cut £1bn in operating costs by the year 2000. Imposing new conditions on its cabin crews will save £42m - but so far it has been thwarted in its aim, despite naked intimidation of Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) members, and threats to sue the union itself. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

Despite BA claims that existing cabin crew would not lose money as a result of the sweeping changes to pay and conditions they have imposed, at best such staff face a three-year wage freeze, whilst new recruits would have a cut of 19 per cent in basic rates of pay. The TGWU represents about 9,000 out of 12,000 cabin crew, whilst the company union Cabin Crew 89 'represents' most of the remainder. The latter have accepted the deal very much in the mould of the Nottinghamshire miners, and have been used by BA to break the TGWU. But TGWU members voted overwhelmingly for strike action at the end of June - 6,400 against 1,700.

The BA response was to threaten to sue anyone taking strike action, and, later, to ban

them from any promotion for the next three years and force them to sign an agreement not to take any further action.

The first of a proposed series of three-day strikes started on 9 June. Only about 2,000 were involved in this action; to avoid victimisation, 1,900 of them phoned in sick whilst just over 300 actually stopped work. Disruption continued well into the following week, when only 200 of those on the sick had decided to report back on duty. The result was that only about one third of normal flights were being run a week later. Boasts by BA that they would ship in scabs and thousands of retrained managers proved empty. A move to suspend staff who took strike action also proved abortive. BA's estimated loss from the strike was £30m.



Airline competition is hotting up, and as a result many are seeking global alliances in order to defend monopoly pricing. BA is no exception - it has special agreements with companies like American Airlines and the Australian carrier QANTAS. But it also needs to cut staff costs, since average returns on ticket sales are falling by two per cent per annum. At the same time that cabin crew voted

to strike, a further 9,000 ground staff, also in the TGWU, voted to strike against the proposal to outsource catering facilities. A flexible workforce means an end to unions, and the BA strategy has been designed to break TGWU organisation as a prelude to imposing even harsher conditions in the future.

The crude tactics employed by BA management have so far backfired. Robert Ayling, BA

Chief Executive, friend of both Tony Blair and Jack Straw to whom he shared his 50th birthday party, may have hoped for an easy ride. But that has not proved the case so far, even though the TGWU leadership has agreed in principle to staff savings. For socialists, the issue is quite clear: we must support whatever signs of resistance there are against the ruthless attacks on our conditions.

Labour education means listen and obey

Immediately after Labour's election victory, David Blunkett, the new Secretary of State for Education and Employment, wrote to every school in the country complaining that 'The turmoil and lack of consultation over recent years has damaged the morale of the [education] service', and promising that, '...unless we are working in partnership with you we cannot achieve our goals.' JIM CRAVEN examines Labour's education policy.

In the last edition of FRFI we pointed out that, 'No one should remain in any doubt that the Labour Party will be even more ruthless than the Tories in forcing education to follow the dictates of capitalism.' ('Two futures for working class education', FRFI 137, June/July 1997)

Since taking office Labour has certainly proved as bad as our word. For within a few days of his declaration of a new era of partnership, Blunkett had publicly pilloried 18 so-called failing schools, announced that 'failure will not be tolerated', appointed detested Tory hatchet-man Chris Woodhead as co-vice chair of the Task Force on Standards and called for streamlined means for sacking 15,000 teachers.

Among other measures announced since then are compulsory target-setting for schools, with threats of hit squads, school closures and the withholding of extra funding (sic) from schools that fail to comply and the replacement of whole education authorities if they fail to reach targets.

The whole tenor of the rhetoric is authoritarian; full of 'zero tolerance', 'can-do government' and 'beating competitors'. This is not a government that is going to brook opposition. Their so-called consultation is confined to their agenda or restricted to selective groups of sympathisers. Every government tries to reach an educational consensus from among the contending interests of the ruling class. The Tories failed to do this because of their crude preference for selection and market forces. The ruling class expect Labour to end this uncertainty. They seem set to impose a set-

tlement. The teachers' unions are already falling in line.

Every attempt to forge an educational settlement has some ideological catchphrase which obscures the reality of the changes taking place. In the 1960s it was 'modernisation'; in the 1980s it was 'choice and diversity'; under New Labour it is to be 'raising standards'.

In May a DfEE press statement told us that 'education, education and education' was to be interpreted as 'standards, standards and standards'. Who, after all, could possibly disagree with raising standards?

There is, however, a price to pay for 'raising standards'. For example, the first targets for Labour's offensive are primary school literacy and numeracy. Labour expects standards to be raised massively over the next few years. To do this other subjects must be neglected. The report from Labour's Task Force on Literacy dismissed all other subjects as 'clutter'. Chris Woodhead, writing about primary basics in the *Observer* said, 'I am tempted to say nothing else matters.' To achieve this raising of standards without extra resources Labour proposes a much greater proportion of whole-class teaching. This must inevitably lead to more setting and streaming of children by ability, a process that Labour will encourage since they have explicitly stated their opposition to mixed ability teaching. Although Labour have abandoned the expensive idea of more opted-out schools they are bent on reinforcing the principle of selection by ability within the comprehensive system. Since they have no intention of ending private education

or of abandoning the grammar and grant-maintained schools that already exist, the education system overall is set to become even more elitist and hierarchical than at present. Schools, driven by the fear of failure and public humiliation, will adopt more and more mechanical and competitive means to reach their test and examination targets. Creativity, opportunities to think critically and to act collectively, already extremely limited in state schools, will diminish still further.

The justification for Labour's policy is, of course, 'the needs of the economy'. No one in the education hierarchy ever talks about any other purpose for education any more. We need to 'keep up with our global competitors' by creating a highly trained and flexible workforce, equipped to move into more hi-tech industries. This, we are told, is the only way to solve the problems of unemployment, particularly among the young, and to create greater prosperity for all.

Of course, this preparation for work argument has some attractions for capitalists. At some levels, particularly that of supervisor and technician, better skills can lead to greater productivity. New technology may require a few workers trained in new high level skills. A bigger pool of trained workers helps to keep down demands for better wages and conditions and facilitates expansion when business picks up. Capitalists spend £30 billion a year on education and training, a figure comparable to that of state spending, £10 billion of which is spent on basic skills. They would love to off-load some of these costs onto

the education system.

Strategically, however, this economic argument holds little weight. New technology increases, not decreases, unemployment among the bulk of the workforce and de-skills most of the remainder. Over the past 10 years the majority of new jobs have been low-paid, low-skill, casual and part-time. Unemployment among highly trained graduates, at around 8%, is comparable to overall rates of unemployment. Nor is there any evidence that youth unemployment is especially sensitive to better training. Young people have never been so highly qualified, yet youth unemployment remains at high levels. In an article for the Institute for Public Policy Research, Blanchflower and Freeman demonstrated that youth unemployment is closely linked with levels of overall unemployment so the best way to reduce youth unemployment is to make more jobs generally available. As for labour flexibility being the key to greater prosperity, a recent OECD report confirmed what working class people have known for a long time: that labour flexibility, far from increasing opportunity, simply locks people into a vicious cycle of low-paid and insecure jobs.

So, if economic arguments only partly explain the huge priority being given to education by Labour, we must look elsewhere for the full explanation.

David Blunkett tells us, 'This is a crusade about the economic prosperity and the social cohesion of the country'.

Since its inception, state education has been a means of social control; of socialising working class youngsters into capitalist values and social structures; of educating them 'to know their place'. In recent years, as the capitalist crisis has deepened and youth unemployment has proved so intractable, there have been evident signs of growing discontent, particu-



Whatever the initial optimism, in the long term Labour will be unable to deliver even their limited vision of quality education

larly among the most deprived sections of working class youth. In the last seven years the number of jobless people under 25 has increased by 23% and the number out of work for more than a year by 75%. Exclusions from school have more than quadrupled over the same period to around 11,000 new exclusions per year. Of school age offenders sentenced at court, 42% have been excluded from school and a further 23% are truants.

The ruling class has always been concerned to smooth over the volatile period of school to work transition. They are clearly worried about these recent trends. David Blunkett told industry that, 'It is essential that government, business and education work together to ensure that young people are better motivated and therefore more employable.' By motivation, of course, he means submission.

Labour's policy documents make frequent references to providing better prospects to young people from deprived areas. They have even made practical gestures to this rhetoric, with plans for Education Action Zones, homework clubs and holiday literacy camps. Capitalists have given token support to these initiatives; the most recent example being a donation of £250,000 towards the holiday literacy camps by that well-known philanthropic org-

anisation, Rupert Murdoch's News International.

The talk, then, is of high expectations, equal opportunities and fulfilling everyone's potential. The reality, however, is to fix potentially rebellious youth into the system by committing them to the discipline of training and work. A structured system of targets, standards and qualifications where only those willing to compete and 'raise their standards' can expect a job or to remain on the treadmill of training and re-training. For those who try to step off the treadmill there will be Welfare to Work. For those who refuse to get on it, Labour are preparing longer exclusions from school with more pupil referral units to accommodate them. And for those working class kids who still refuse to conform, Labour are planning a new fast-track – the Crime and Disorder Bill and prison sentences for 12-year-olds.

Whatever the initial optimism, in the long term Labour will be unable to deliver even their limited vision of quality education. The problem is not that the education system is failing the capitalist economy but rather that the moribund social and economic system of capitalism that Labour supports can never provide a decent life for everyone nor the liberating, life-enhancing education that goes with it. ■

Labour is no better for your health

For the last 18 years Labour Party supporters have repeatedly said that things will be better once the Tories have been kicked out. Now, with New Labour in place, they are saying that we must wait a bit because of the legacy of Conservative rule. We must not let this false optimism, naivety and excuse for lethargy take hold. Whatever you know about cutbacks, job losses, private contractors etc in the National Health Service at a local level is just a microcosm of the whole picture.

69 out of 100 health authorities and 125 out of 425 trusts started this financial year in debt. The NHS faces £300m shortfall at the start of the year. In London alone there are 171 vacant GP posts. The death rates between the rich and the poor are widening. The Kings Fund Commission report out this week highlights the lack of funding, especially for the elderly.

Competitive tendering of services means that more and more staff, domestics, porters, who used to work for the NHS, now work for slave wages, non-unionised, with no holiday pay, sick pay or pension rights. The 52 Hillingdon women are now in their 22nd month of protest following their sacking for standing up for their employment rights, and UNISON has

declared the dispute unofficial.

In East London there have been savage cuts in the school health service. East London and the City Health Authority (ELCHA) have £18.4m to save this financial year. For the sake of a few hundred thousand pounds, City and Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets have lost a significant number of school nurses. Bear in mind that it is estimated that 20% of children in Hackney are not registered with a GP; that the incidence of tuberculosis (TB) in east London is seven times the national average (school nurses administer the BCG vaccine against TB); that Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion of under 15-year-olds living in overcrowded conditions; that

Tower Hamlets has asthma rates eight times the national average. The health authority says that GPs can fill the gap in school health: in east London, one GP post in 20 is vacant.

Frank Dobson, the new Secretary of State for Health, is talking of local action zones, increasing health authorities and local authorities working together. He refuses to rule out that there may be a charging system introduced and he admits that hospitals will have to merge. For merge, read close. He claims that it is possible to stop the two-tiered system of GP fundholders whose patients get priority treatment, while not abolishing the internal market.

We can not afford to sit back and trust New Labour. Users and providers of the service must work together to highlight the full extent of the cuts and the implication for the health of the working class people of Britain.

Hannah Caller



McLibel Two verdict: 'Happy meals' can kill!

RICHARD ROQUES

After 313 days the McLibel case has ended. It has been the longest libel trial in British legal history. Legally, McDonald's won. Justice Bell pronounced that the defendants had libelled McDonald's. The corporation had spent over £1m in order to win £60,000 in damages from two defendants who haven't got any money. Not a very good return on their investment, but of course the case was not just about any damages that might be awarded.

When writs were issued against a number of campaigners giving out a leaflet entitled 'What's wrong with McDonald's?' outside branches of their fast food outlets, the corporation certainly didn't expect to end up in court. Up until this time these writs had served to prevent any criticism of the \$30bn multinational company. Individuals, corporations, journalists and newspapers had bowed down to the bullying tactics of a company that threw writs around like confetti, resulting in entire editions of magazines being pulped because they contained articles they didn't like.

The defendants claimed, quite rightly, that the verdict was a victory against the fast food giants. At the press conference after the verdict a US reporter asked them: 'If you call this a victory what would you call a defeat?' This was fairly typical of the television reporting of the verdict which ran the story as 'McDonald's win libel case'. It shows a certain lack of humility that the reporters did not acknowledge that until these two stood up to McBully,



McLibel defendants, Helen Steel and Dave Morris outside the High Court

the media had been unable to report any criticisms of the corporation for fear of being issued with a libel writ. At that press conference defendant Dave Morris said: 'The libel laws are a form of mass censorship in this country.' It seems the media are happy to accommodate this state of affairs. During a four year period McIssueAWrit had taken 'action' against 45 separate organisations including national newspapers, the BBC, magazines, newspapers and a teashop. Very little reporting of the case took place over two years in court, but as the verdict approached, the pundits in the media realised they would have to have something to say. If it had not been for the pressing issue of whether the newly-elected William Hague's lack of hair would prevent him from being a

credible leader of the Tory Party, the verdict in the McLibel trial would have been the first item of the television news. It was the second item on the broadcast media and on the front page of every national newspaper. This was the victory won by the McLibel defendants.

So what was the judgement? Helen Steel and Dave Morris were not only denied legal aid, they were also denied a jury. The burden of proof was on the defendants to show the allegations made in the leaflet were true. The judge ruled that they had not proved that every criticism in the leaflet was justified, so McSqueakyClean had been libelled. Given that the odds were stacked against them, it was quite extraordinary that the judge found that McNasty's exploits children, the food is un-

healthy, they exploit their workers and they are cruel to animals. This is the sort of victory McDontPrintAnythingWeDontLike can do without.

The judge agreed that children were exploited by Mc-Clown's advertising which was 'directed at children, with a view to them pressuring or pestering parents to take them to McDonald's'. He also decided that McRipOffTheCustomer's food, if eaten several times a week, increased the risk of serious diseases. Justice Bell also said McRipOffTheWorkers 'does pay its workers low wages', was 'strongly antipathetic to any idea of unionisation' and 'culpably responsible for cruel practices in the rearing and slaughter of some of the animals which are used to produce their food...'. He stated that the proportion of recycled paper in packaging was 'small but nevertheless significant', so they had been defamed by the statement that 'only a tiny percentage' was recycled. So Mc-Litter win that one but their claim to be eco-friendly is blown wide open.

One of the interesting revelations during the trial was the evidence that seven private detectives were hired by McParanoid to spy on protestors. The agents 'borrowed letters' and broke into the offices of London Greenpeace. McPrivate-Dick from Robert Bishop Ltd. was paid to write a report on a suspicious woman at one of the meetings who, it turns out, was a detective for Kings Investigation Bureau Ltd, also hired by McCloakandDagger. The detectives even distributed the leaflet which was the subject of the libel action.

Part of the strength of the defendants' case has been the insistence that the trial was about the effect multinationals have on our lives. 'Challenge the rich and powerful and get organised' they said at the press

conference. One of the manuals from the McScrewtheWorkers handbook states that 'grill men' have to move left to right, put out six rows of burgers, flip the third row first, then the fourth, fifth and sixth. Only then can they move to the first two rows of burgers. Frightening, isn't it? This is the future for the working class under capitalism.

The future for the campaign

Helen and Dave announced their intention to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights on the wider issue of multinationals using the libel laws to silence criticism of their practices. They have also counterclaimed for libel against McBigLegalBill. The McSpotlight Internet site, containing 19,000 pages of official court transcript has been accessed over nine million times. The aim of the website is to make freely available, accurate, factual information about the corporation and all they stand for. Unable to prevent this happening McWhatTheHellAreThey-SayingAboutUsNow have accessed the site 1,300 times themselves.

London RCG held four pickets of our adopted McHighInFat before and after the verdict. Hundreds of McDonald's stores have been picketed throughout the trial, a new 'Kids Against McDonald's' organisation is growing and there is a support network for workers employed by McBurger. Phone 0171 837 1688 if you want to be involved in future pickets with the RCG.

McLibel Support Campaign: 0171 713 1269. McSpotlight website can be accessed on: <http://www.mcspotlight.org/>

NB. Any word in this article prefixed by the two letters 'Mc' has no connection whatsoever with the \$30bn corporation which sells junk food, pays crap wages to its workers, is cruel to animals, and exploits children.

Fat Cats News



'A new partnership with business will be at the heart of this government's plans'

Tony Blair

'The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.'

Marx and Engels

■ FRFI readers may remember the comments of Northern Foods chairman, Christopher Haskins, that 'if the world went organic today, the world would starve' (FRFI 133). With a new Labour government in power, those concerned with malnutrition will be pleased to hear that Mr Haskins has been appointed head of a new 40-strong government unit in the Cabinet Office. His brief will be to 'revamp' business regulations, including risk-assessment by social services staff and environmental regulation throughout Britain.

■ Congratulations are also due to Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays Bank, now head of a Treasury taskforce on the tax and benefits system. Also Peter Jarvis, chief executive of Whitbread, now head of the Low Pay Commission responsible for setting the minimum wage. They can now enjoy political power without that boring electioneering that other politicians find so tiring.

■ Good news for working class education: Michael Barber, author of *The Learning Game* (see FRFI 137) and member of the Hackney Downs School 'hit squad', is now Special Adviser on Standards and Effectiveness in Schools.

■ Geoffrey Robinson MP, owner of the *New Statesman*, has been made Paymaster General. Millionaire Robinson, former chief executive of Jaguar Cars, will be overseeing privatisation issues, the Private Finance Initiative and Welfare to Work.

■ Derek Fatchett MP, minister of state in the Foreign Office responsible for the Middle East, North Africa and the Far East, is now also responsible for export promotion. Lucky then for the people of these regions that Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has promised that no arms will be sold where they could be used for repression or aggression. Otherwise one could fear the worst in, for example, Saudi Arabia. It remains to be seen whether Labour will be cancelling its invitation to leading Indonesian generals to attend Britain's annual arms jamboree in September.

■ Elsewhere, David Simon, former chair of oil giant BP, provoked a non-incident in Parliament by refusing to give up his £2.15m shareholding in the company. David, now Lord, Simon 'is not involved in any DTI business which covers BP, nor does he receive any papers which have a bearing on BP' according to Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade. Simon is now Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe. His brief includes labour flexibility in Europe, and he will sit on cabinet committees on Europe, the economy and Britain's presidency of the EU. Meanwhile news of BP's close relations with the police and army in Colombia continues to emerge, including a recent report detailing the corporation's sponsorship of counter-insurgency training by two ex-SAS officers from the team which stormed the Iranian embassy in 1980.

Its good to see the right people will be on the spot.

Steve Byrne

The ABC of destruction will continue in the next issue.

Vicious sentences for icing sugar plot

NICKI JAMESON

On 2 July, after a 12-week Old Bailey trial, six members of an IRA active service unit were sentenced to 35 years imprisonment each for conspiring to cause explosions at electricity sub-stations around London; explosions which, it was alleged by the prosecution, would have blacked out the capital and wreaked havoc for months to come.

In a highly unusual court case the men openly admitted being an IRA Active Service Unit sent to England to carry out operations in the early part of 1996. Gerry Hanratty told the court that he 'wouldn't have a problem if directed by the IRA to plant bombs which would in any way destroy the electric sub-stations, but in this case it was never discussed. I was never asked.' Instead, the plot which Gerry and his comrades were involved in was in line with recent IRA strategy of causing massive disruption by the planting of hoax bombs. The boxes found at the time of the men's arrest were to be filled

not with Semtex but with icing sugar, which when X-rayed by disposal experts would produce the same result and convince them they were dealing with a real bomb. With hoax devices planted simultaneously at all London's sub-stations, the electricity company would itself be compelled to turn off the power and black out London for at least 24 hours.

The jury spent 12½ hours deliberating before finding the men guilty by a 10-2 majority. A seventh man, Martin Murphy, who was not involved in the operation but had come to England to bring a message, was acquitted. Martin gave moving evidence about how he grew up in west Belfast under British occupation, became involved in and completely committed to the Republican struggle, but at this particular time had chosen to play a supporting rather than frontline role. Despite the best efforts of the Crown Prosecution Service QC Nigel Sweeney to rubbish his testimony, the jury clearly believed him.

The moment the sentences were passed, the media erupted into a paroxysm of pre-planned

police propaganda, congratulating M15 and Special Branch on the massive surveillance operation which led to the arrests. A Scotland Yard spokesman earnestly repeated that the convicted men were the most dangerous collection of terrorists ever assembled in one dock.

The six men have been punished not for what they did, or even what they conspired to do, but for who they are: committed Irish Republicans prepared to take the struggle against British imperialism to its heartland. It is significant that the first IRA volunteers convicted under New Labour received five years longer than any POW currently serving a finite (ie non-life) sentence in England.

Solidarity greetings and best wishes to Donald Gannon (XK0720 - birthday 17 August) and Gerry Hanratty (XK0721), who are in HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York YO4 1PS and John Crawley (XK0725), Patrick Martin (XK0722 - birthday 18 August), Eoin Morrow (XK0727) and Frank Rafferty (XK0723), who are all at HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR. ■

Black Panther welcomed in Dundee

MICHAEL MCGREGOR

On a cold May evening, former Black Panther Lorenzo Komboa Ervin went walkabout in an area of Dundee plagued by unemployment and poverty.

His tour, organised by local anarchists, had caused a fuss in the local press because of Lorenzo's background which involved hijacking a plane to Cuba in 1967. As Lorenzo explained, the Ku Klux Klan and the FBI were framing and killing black activists everywhere, and he had taken this step to defend himself. He was now on tour around the world to organise against racism, specifically to draw attention to the case of Mumia Abu Jamal, also a former Panther, who is being railroaded to the electric chair by the US legal and prison system.

The response to his visit to Kirkton in Dundee was overwhelming. Soon he was surrounded by a group of 100 youth who insisted on shaking his hand, getting his autograph and welcoming him warmly to their community. As the biting wind and rain made an outdoor meeting impossible, it was suggested that the gathering try to

secure some space at the local community centre.

The young citizens' marched up to the centre only to be told there was no space - the local Labour Party was having its AGM. A 12-year-old girl stepped forward to insist that since Lorenzo had come all the way from the States and that, as it was their community and their community centre, they were coming in whether they liked it or not!

Foyer space in the building was occupied and Lorenzo gave the background to his struggle and the struggle for civil rights and against racism in the US. He gave a vivid account of his involvement in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s in the southern states of the US. Having joined the Black Panther Party, he was forced to flee for his life and eventually spent 15 years in jail in the US, five of them in the notorious control units.

The most memorable and uplifting aspect of his account was his sober commitment to continue to resist and his conviction that out of this resistance to racism and oppression will emerge the revolutionary forces of the future. ■

HONG KONG says goodbye to British imperialism

Hong Kong was swarming with journalists. Many of the western reporters were, of course, scouring the city to find people opposed to or at least worried about the handover, but were largely disappointed. In fact, the change was welcomed, or at least accepted, by the great majority of Hong Kong's people, 98 percent of whom are ethnic Chinese. In the rest of China, Hong Kong's return was greeted with ecstatic nationalistic celebrations, marking the end of a century and a half of humiliation at the hands of the imperialist powers.

150 years of colonial rule

Hong Kong was stolen from China in three stages. First, in 1841 during the First Opium War, British Naval Captain Charles Elliot seized Hong Kong island. The next year, China was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing, agreeing, amongst other humiliations, to cede Hong Kong to Britain, supposedly as a safe place to repair ships. Its real function was as a base for opium trading and for controlling the Pearl River delta and China's southern coastline to back up future British aggression. Second, following the Second Opium War (1856-58) Britain forced China to cede the Kowloon peninsula. Finally, in 1898, Britain made China grant it a 99-year lease on the much larger New Territories and outlying islands.

In 1911, China's weak and rotten Qing Dynasty was overthrown by revolutionary forces and the Republic of China (ROC) was founded. ROC founding father, President Sun Yatsen, declared all the treaties signed with imperialist powers to be unequal ones signed only under coercion, which China did not recognise. At the Versailles conference following the First World War, China applied for Hong Kong and other concessions to be returned but the appeal fell on deaf ears.

During the Second World War, Hong Kong suffered its darkest days as it was occupied by the brutal Japanese army for three and a half years. After Japan's surrender, despite protestations by China's President Chiang Kaishek, Hong Kong was returned not to China, but to Britain.

Following the overthrow of the by then hopelessly oppressive and corrupt ROC by the communists and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the new government in Beijing declared the unequal treaties to be invalid and vowed to take Hong Kong back at 'an appropriate time.'

China became militarily strong enough to take Hong Kong back by force, but it never did. The main reason for this was China's need to break out of imperialist-imposed isolation. With its colony of Hong Kong right on China's doorstep, Britain had no choice but to deal with the communist authorities in China. Thus Britain was the first of the major capitalist countries to recognise the PRC, while others such as France only began to do so over a decade later, with the USA holding out for over 20 years.

After 155 years of British occupation, Hong Kong finally returned to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July. JONATHAN COHEN reflects on the former colonial outpost of British imperialism.

In the wake of China's civil war of 1946-49, Hong Kong had vast numbers of refugees living in sprawling, fire-prone shantytowns. To make matters worse, in 1951 the USA organised a UN embargo against China, threatening to destroy Hong Kong's livelihood as a trade gateway to the mainland. To find employment for the refugees and achieve a new source of income, the British decided to industrialise Hong Kong. Hong Kong-made products such as textiles, clothes and toys enjoyed low-tariff or tariff-free access to the markets of Britain and other Commonwealth countries until Britain joined the European Common Market in 1973. Hong Kong's access to these markets provided the conditions for its take-off as an industrial city. At the same time, its industrialisation and growing population made it ever more dependent on China for food, fuel, raw materials and especially for water. If Hong Kong is the goose which lays the golden eggs, then China is the farmer who feeds it. If Britain were to get its share of the eggs, it would have to play ball with China.

Thanks to socialist planning, China had built up a modern transport and power infrastructure and a strong heavy industrial base. Starting from the early 1980s, the Chinese government started encouraging foreign investment in order to obtain the technology and capital necessary for launching an economic takeoff from this base. Hong Kong capital has spread into Shenzhen, the Pearl River Delta and other parts of China, where labour and land are cheaper and more plentiful. Hong Kong itself has become deindustrialised, entering the third phase of its development as a financial and trading hub. In the process, Hong Kong's per capita gross domestic product has surpassed those of Britain, Canada and Germany.

'An appropriate time'

Visiting China in 1982, British Prime Minister Thatcher suggested to Deng Xiaoping that Britain's lease on the New Territories could be renewed after it ran out in 1997. Deng's response was that China had said long ago that it would take Hong Kong back at an appropriate time, and that 1997 would indeed be an appropriate time to take back not only the New Territories, but Kowloon and Hong Kong Island as well. Thatcher had to grudgingly admit that China was calling the shots, and set about negotiating to get the best deal for British interests after 1997. The outcome was a promise from China that Hong Kong would remain basically unchanged for the first 50 years after its return, retaining its capitalist economy and British-style legal system. This is the concept known as 'one

country, two systems', which had originally been formulated as a basis for reuniting Taiwan with the mainland. Had China not made this promise, virtually all Hong Kong and foreign capital would have left the colony, along with many of its wealthiest and best qualified residents, leaving China with an empty shell to take back.

Throughout the 1980s, Britain and China were cooperating well on preparations for the handover. The hitches started to come in 1989. Following the political upheavals which culminated in the Beijing rebellion in June of that year and its bloody suppression, Britain perceived the Chinese government as being in a weak position, and started pushing its luck. Governor David Wilson announced plans for an enormous project to build a new international airport without consulting the Chinese side. The costs of the project would be so vast that it would leave Hong Kong in serious financial difficulties by the time China took over. It is not hard to guess which country was going to get the cream of the lucrative construction contracts. At the same time, the British started making changes to the political system which were in breach of what had been agreed with China. Alongside the formation of political parties, the number of seats in the Legislative Council that were elected began to be increased, although the Council did not gain any more power, and all legislation was still subject to veto by the British-appointed governor.

Had Britain really cared about democracy in Hong Kong, it would have introduced elections some time in the first 149 years of its occupation instead of the last six. The real intention was clearly to make Hong Kong as difficult for China to absorb as possible.

British Governor Chris Patten's trouble-making lasted right up to the last few days of his rule, as he tried to insist that China could not start moving armed troops into Hong Kong until after the midnight handover. As if Britain's troops were going to vanish instantly at the point of midnight. There is no city in the world of the size and importance of Hong Kong which does not have armed forces stationed in it.

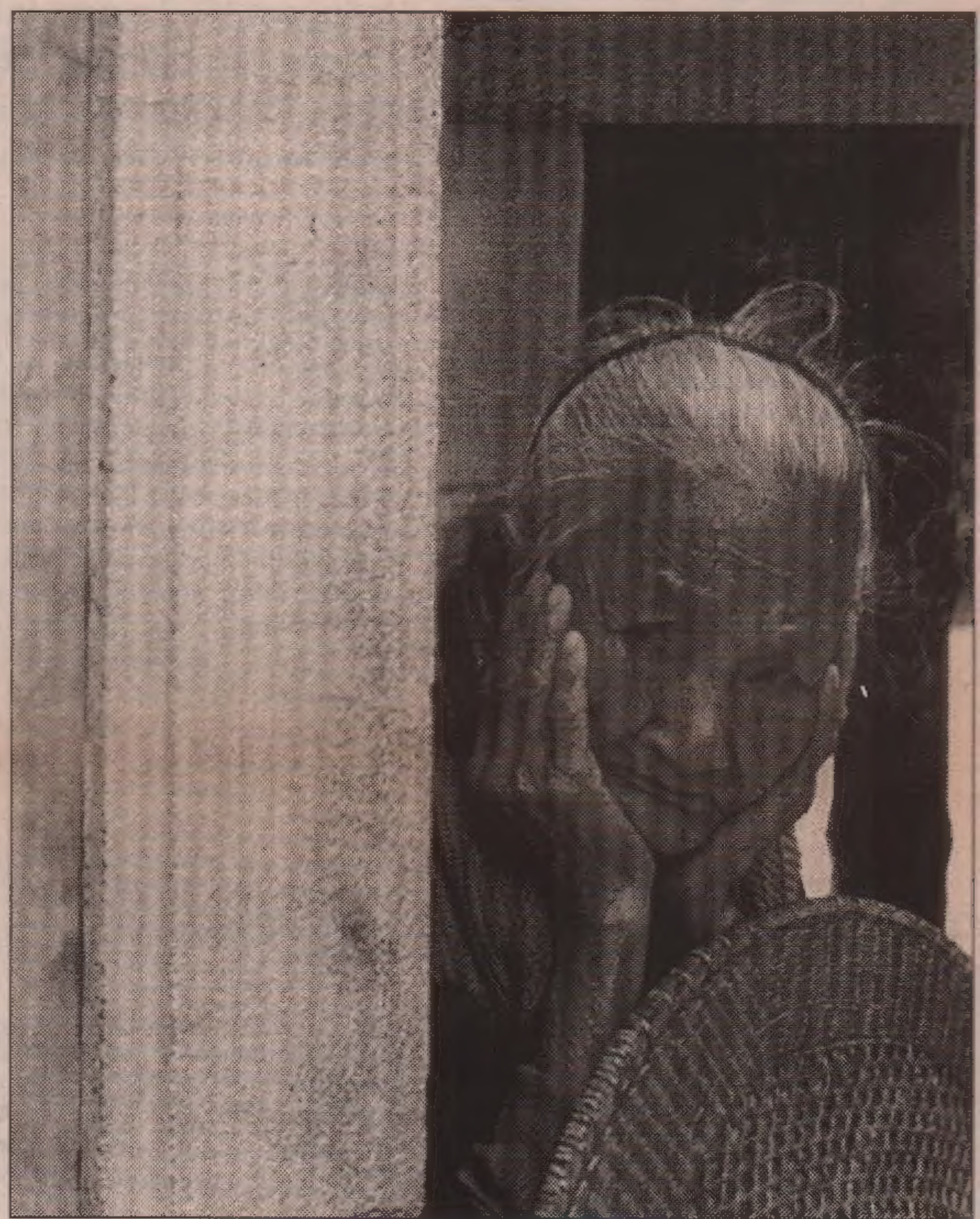
Assessing Britain's role

Can Britain's role be seen as positive? If we confine our vision to Hong Kong alone, then the answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the public transport system is great, traffic runs smoothly, the streets are clean and most people abide by the law without coercion. On the other, the mafia-like triad gangs have never been eliminated and drug addiction, prostitution and illegal gambling remain serious problems. On the one hand, Hong Kong has achieved great wealth. On the other, it is very unequally distrib-

influence' in China, which swept all the way from Guangdong and Shanghai in the East to Tibet in the West. While Britain may boast of the numbers of refugees the colony absorbed, it must be pointed out that Britain bore considerable responsibility for causing the poverty, disorder and war from which they were fleeing.

The radars and aerials which bristle from almost every available mountaintop in Hong Kong testify to its continued role as an international spy base after the Second World War. The colony was also a key site for 'rest and recreation' (go-go bars and prostitution) for British, US and other imperialist armed forces during the Korean and Vietnam wars and on up to the present day.

A key base like this is not to be maintained by repression alone. Social order, stability and a substantial layer of loyal natives are also required. Britain was challenged by resistance many times during its long occupation. Most outstanding among these were the long general strikes, initiated by dockers and influenced



uted. Among the population of six million, one million low-paid workers and their families live in dwellings that average more than seven persons per room.

Then there are the 'cage people', mostly elderly men, who live in steel-mesh cages stacked two and three high, each only big enough for a mattress. These cages fill decaying slum buildings. Many of the over 10,000 'cage people' have lived this way for decades. Another half-million are either homeless or live as squatters in shacks and makeshift dwellings on the outskirts of the sprawling urban landscape.

Nevertheless, the whole purpose of Hong Kong from the outset has been for exploitation. Quite simply, why else would you want a colony? Imperialism is quite capable of looking after a particular area or population or part of a population in order to achieve domination and exploitation on a wider scale. Look at Ireland for an obvious example. Hong Kong served British imperialism as a base for the barbaric pillage of China during the opium wars. It was a base for Britain's decisive military intervention against the gigantic, progressive Taiping Rebellion in the mid 19th century, and against the anti-imperialist Boxer Rebellion which coincided with the Boer War. It was the guardpost for Britain's 'sphere of

by the Chinese Communist Party, which paralysed Hong Kong in 1922 and again in 1925-26, as well as the anti-British strikes and riots of 1967 in which 51 people were killed and hundreds more wounded or arrested. In order to maintain its grip on the colony, Britain was forced to make concessions each time. In the face of mass popular protest, it was forced in the 1970s to set up the Internal Commission Against Corruption to deal with rampant corruption in the police force and other sectors of the colonial government. Despite Hong Kong's reputation as a dog-eat-dog arena of pure capitalism, efficient social services and some elements of a welfare state have been introduced in recent years to prevent the social upheavals that would arise if too many of the people were living in abject poverty.

When we communists study the present, we look to the past to understand it better. When we study a city, we look at the whole country, and when we study a country, we look at the world. We see both the wood and the trees that grow in it. That is why, while recognising that the British have created some things in Hong Kong which are worth preserving, we condemn British colonialism without reserve and warmly welcome Hong Kong's reunification with China.

India was truly 'the jewel in the crown' of British imperialism. From 1757, when Clive's victory over the Mogul of India started the plunder of Bengal, India was a source of untold wealth, exceeding even that generated by the slave trade. The results were no less destructive: the imposition of capitalist relations on the Indian rural economy led to regular famines during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whilst Bengal itself was reduced from conditions of development equivalent to those in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century to the abject poverty that characterises the Bangla Desh of today. If the slave trade had created a mercantile power out of British capitalism, it was the plunder of Bengal that provided the money capital to advance the Industrial Revolution.

CONQUEST

The British conquest of India was possible because of its ability to exploit divisions between local feudal interests and then maintain its rule by extending and deepening them. Although there were progressive aspects to British rule – the introduction of modern forms of communication such as the railways and telegraph system, the destruction of feudal modes of existence, the establishment of modern technical education for a small section of the indigenous population – these were accompanied by the creation of a massive surplus population living on the edge of starvation through the destruction of the local textile industry (to allow India to serve as a mass market for the one being established in Britain), and by the introduction of private ownership of the land. The resulting ferment coalesced in the Mutiny of 1857, suppressed with savage brutality.

This was to mark a turning point. Until that time, the policy of British imperialism had been to create a unified colony out of thousands of feudal statelets. It had encouraged substantial Indian representation in the lower rungs of the Indian Civil Service and the medical, legal and teaching professions were almost completely Indian. The Mutiny changed all this: the involvement of the dispossessed had terrified the British ruling class. From then on British imperialism allied itself with the princely states against the masses, so that the political map of India would remain a mosaic of divided fiefdoms – 565 of them, with a fifth of India's total population of some 300 to 400 million.

THE CONGRESS MOVEMENT

Significant opposition to British rule did not emerge again until the early 1900s. In the meantime, a retired official of the Indian Civil Service, Allan Hume, had set up the Indian National Congress, and served as general secretary from its foundation in 1885 until 1908. Hume regarded Congress as 'a safety valve for the escape of growing forces generated by our (ie British) own action...and no more efficacious safety valve than our own Congress movement could possibly be devised', and in its early years, it acted as a debating society for the English-educated bourgeoisie.

Yet it could not remain like this. Within its ranks, divisions between the wealthy landlord interests and the petty bourgeoisie – teachers, lawyers and students – began to appear, with the latter starting to agitate for independence. The first test came in 1905, with the proposal by the Viceroy of India to partition Bengal and so drive a wedge between the Hindu and Moslem populations. A mass boycott movement developed, led by the petty bourgeois wing of Congress. The colonial administration attacked it ruthlessly, jailing hundreds, breaking up meetings, and passing new repressive legislation. When one of the leaders, Tilak, was jailed for six years in 1908, textile workers in Bombay went on strike, an event hailed by Lenin. Armed

INDIA

the struggle for independence

PART ONE: TO 1931

15 August 1997 marks the 50th anniversary of the formal independence of the Indian sub-continent. ROBERT CLOUGH outlines the course of the struggle to end British colonial rule, how British imperialism was able to ensure that it ended with a neo-colonial solution, where political independence masked a continuing domination by imperialist rule, and how the Labour Party would be critical in achieving this aim.

Between 1815 and 1832, the value of Indian cotton exports fell from £1.3 million to £100,000. In the same period, the value of English cotton imports into India rose from £26,000 to £400,000. By 1850, India which had for centuries exported cotton to the world, accounted for one quarter of all British cotton exports. The population of Dacca, centre of the cotton industry, fell from 150,000 to 30-40,000. In 1797 exports of Dacca muslin amounted to 3 million rupees; by 1817 they had ceased altogether. Such was the impact of the tariffs imposed on Indian cotton imports. Without them there would have been no English cotton industry.

organisation emerged in the struggle, adding to the threat posed to British rule, which responded by encouraging inter-communal strife. In 1911, after some minor political concessions, the proposal was quietly withdrawn.

Yet the seeds of future division had been sown. Inter-communal strife had a material basis in Bengal: a section of the Moslem bourgeoisie had stood to gain from the partition of Bengal, and had opposed the boycott campaign. The result was the formation of the Moslem League, with a membership restricted to '400 men of property and influence' – a sound indication as to its class nature.



Gandhi on his way to make salt in defiance of the British monopoly

'THINK IMPERIALY'

The next major challenge to Congress was the outbreak of the First Imperialist War in 1914, which India also entered by virtue of a declaration of the Viceroy. At each of its four annual sessions during the War, Congress proclaimed its support for British imperialism. Gandhi, newly arrived from South Africa, urged his colleagues to 'think imperialy', but when he offered to raise a corps of stretcher-bearers for the campaign in the Middle East, the Viceroy excused him on the grounds of his ill-health, adding that 'his presence in India itself at that critical time would be of more service than any that he might be able to render abroad' – prophetic words indeed.

By the end of the war, India was in turmoil. Britain had plundered it of manpower, finance and food resources. The first three years of the war had cost India £270 million: part of this was used to fund the one million strong army it provided to British imperialism, and which was crucial in preventing the German Army from occupying the Channel ports in its 1914-15 campaign. But it also included a forced loan of £100 million, a sum equivalent to at least £5 billion in today's terms. And, at a time when two-thirds of the population was starving, Indian exports of wheat and cereals amounted to 2.5 million tons in 1917, and even more in 1918.

The mutinous state of the Indian Army, and the impact of the Russian revolution, meant that some political concessions to the nascent Indian bourgeoisie were needed to stabilise imperialist rule. The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, touring India in 1918, described the 'seething, boiling, political flood raging across the country'. He proclaimed the Government's aim as 'the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.' Together with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, he prepared a report on the necessary constitutional changes to buy off at least one section of the Indian bourgeoisie.

'REFORM'

The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were based on a plan devised by one Lionel Curtis. Responsibility for three departments, education, health and local government, would be transferred to elected ministers, but only at a provincial level: national structures would remain unchanged. Even then, the vital department of finance would remain under the con-

Deaths through famine in India:

1800-25	1 million
1825-50	0.4 million
1850-75	5 million
1875-1900	15 million

The 1931 census revealed the true nature of private ownership of the land. 4 million landlords owned 75 per cent of the land; one third of them owned 70 per cent of all arable land. 66 million tenant-cultivators owned the remainder, whilst 33 million were landless labourers. In the Punjab, a survey of 27 farms showed that the landlord took 82 per cent of the produce. In Bengal, at a time when the tax revenues were £3 million, the zemindars or landlords collected £13 million. Between 1911 and 1940, total peasant indebtedness rose from £225 million to £1.2 billion, so that 'indebtedness, often amounting to insolvency, is the normal condition of Indian farmers' (*The Problem of India*, p41, Shelvankar, Penguin, 1940).

trol of the Indian Civil Service. There would be a franchise: 3 million out of 350 million people would be allowed the vote. The progress of these reforms would then be reviewed after a period of ten years. At the request of the Labour Party, Curtis produced a pamphlet explaining his proposals for use by Labour candidates in the 1918 General Election. 'At present', he wrote, 'the number of people who could understand the vote is small. To grant full responsible government outright...would place government in the hands of a very few' – an ironic statement given how few ruled it through the Indian Civil Service at the time.

However, such 'reforms' were irrelevant to the mass of the Indian people. Famine stalked the land: estimates as to the number who died from a combination of flu and starvation in 1918-19 range from 12 to 30 million. The countryside was a tinder-box: and starting in the heartland of the cotton industry, Bombay, a massive strike wave spread throughout the major industrial centres. The only response was repression: a Bill enacting new measures to combat 'sedition' and 'terrorism' proposed by the Rowlatt Committee took effect in March 1919. On 13 April, a meeting against the Rowlatt Act took place in Amritsar in the Punjab. Under the command of General Dwyer, a column of troops opened fire on the peaceful crowd. 379 people were murdered, 1,200 injured.

BOYCOTTS AND STRIKES

The result was an explosion. The first six months of 1920 saw 200 strikes involving 1.5 million workers. In September 1920, Congress authorised a progressively extending boycott movement. Under Gandhi's reluctant leadership, the campaign spread throughout early 1921: spontaneous non-payment of taxes started in some areas; more ominously for the Indian landlord class, peasants started to go on rent strike. A huge general strike greeted the arrival of the Prince of Wales in November of that year.

But Gandhi, now in control of Congress, ruled out an amendment to the aims of Congress to call for complete independence, and then refused to sanction a call for the non-payment of taxes. For three months, he remained silent, and then, on 1 February 1922, he sent a letter to the Viceroy, stating that unless all prisoners were released, and the Rowlatt Act repealed, he would authorise a campaign of mass civil disobedience – but one confined to the tiny District of Bardoli, home to a mere 87,000 people.

Hardly had the letter been sent when news came that peasants had stormed the police station in the village of Chauri Chaura and burned 22 policemen to death. Immediately, he called off the campaign complaining in the so-called Bardoli declaration that 'the country is not non-violent enough', advising 'the cultivators to pay land revenue and other taxes due to the government, and to suspend every other activity of an offensive nature', and ordering the peasants that withholding of rent payment to the landlords was 'injurious to the best interests of the country'.

For the impoverished peasants, there was little difference between paying taxes to the British authorities and rents to the native landlords. Both were part of a system that kept them in bondage. The passage from opposition to the British to opposition to the landlords was but a small step. And that is what Gandhi and Congress feared. The Bardoli Declaration was far more about the rights of property than about Gandhi's supposed hatred of violence. The results were immediate. Gandhi was arrested, and was retired for six years to the palatial accommodation that was reserved for him whenever he went to gaol. The Moslem League split from Congress for what it regarded as its extremism, whilst another section formed the Swaraj League to contest elections to the local assemblies. Four communists were arrested for conspiracy, tried,

A black and white portrait of a man in a military uniform, identified as Major-General Sir John Dill. He is wearing a tunic with epaulettes and a sash, and has a mustache.

Muslims as % of total population, 1931
(by major administrative regions)

Pattern	Percentage Range
Solid Black	Over 60%
Cross-hatch	40-60%
Horizontal Lines	20-40%
Vertical Lines	10-20%
Dots	0-10%

Source: A Statistical Atlas of South Asia, University of Chicago Press



Gandhi visits Buckingham Palace

■ **LF Rushbrook-Williams in the Evening Standard 28 May 1930 on the princely states**

'The situations of these feudatory States, checkerboarding all India as they do, are a great safeguard. It is like establishing a vast network of friendly fortresses in debatable territory. It would be difficult for a general rebellion against the British to sweep India because of this network of powerful loyal Native States.'

LABOUR BETRAYAL

Political conditions did not change with the advent of the first Labour Government in 1924. Ramsay MacDonald as both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary stated in case there was any doubt that 'I can see no hope in India if it becomes the arena of a struggle between constitutionalism and revolution. No party in Great Britain will be cowed by threats of force or by policies designed to bring Government to a standstill; and if any section in India are under the delusion that is not so, events will sadly disappoint them.' And as if to underline its position, the government sanctioned the passage of yet more repressive legislation, the Bengal Ordinance, which allowed for detention without charge let alone trial.

In late 1927, the Tory Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, decided to bring forward the statutory review of the progress of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in order to guarantee Tory control of the Commission that would carry it out. With the complete eclipse of the Liberals at the 1924 election, Labour had become the Loyal Opposition; this meant they would be entitled to seats on the Commission. In negotiations with MacDonald on its composition, Birkenhead's aim was to exclude any Indian representation, whilst MacDonald's was to ensure the presence of at least two Labour members. Both achieved what they wanted, and MacDonald over-ruled Labour Party executive objections to the absence of any Indians. The two Labour nominees were Clement Attlee and Steven Walsh, the latter a notorious imperialist.

The enabling act setting up the Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon was rushed through Parliament by Christmas 1927. All sections of the Indian nationalist movement were outraged. The Indian TUC passed a motion demanding that Labour 'withdraw its members from the Simon Commission', and resolved that it itself would boycott it. Its President, Chaman Lal, protesting what he described as MacDonald's 'imperialist proclivities' went on to say 'All classes are aghast at the betrayal by the Labour Party. The Simon Commission will register the middle class imperialist verdict.' Pandhit Nehru, on behalf of Congress told the Labour NEC 'I am authorised to state that the action of the Labour Party, in not withdrawing its members from the Commission, and trying to effect some kind of compromise, is not supported by any responsible party in India.'

The Simon Commission together with Attlee arrived in India in February 1928, to be greeted by a general strike; three demonstrators were killed in a demonstration in Madras. As it proceeded round the country, it was greeted with mass demonstrations, strikes and riots. The Indian working class played a leading role: a colossal strike movement in 1928, with over 30 million days lost, was accompanied by a 70 per cent growth in union membership, with a massive growth of the revolutionary Bombay Girni Kardar or Red Flag Union. Meanwhile the 1928 Labour Conference debated a motion opposing the Commission. Fortified by a TUC report attacking the middle class leadership of the Indian trade union movement, the conference trounced opposition by 3 million votes to 150,000. No wonder Shapurji Saklatvala, the British Communist MP, reported for the *Daily Worker*:

It has been well-known for some time that the Commission would have a hostile reception from the Indian workers, who view it as the latest weapon of British imperialism...When the Bombay workers burned the effigy of MacDonald in

'I shall be no party to dispossessing the propertied classes of their private property without just cause...You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing a class war...Supposing there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property you will find me fighting on your side.'

the streets along with that of Lord Birkenhead and others, they showed that they viewed the Labour Party as nothing more or less than the willing hirelings of British imperialism.'

BRITISH TERROR

British imperialism was given breathing space by a split in the Indian National Congress at the end of 1928: whilst the left wanted an immediate campaign for independence, Gandhi and the bourgeois wing made any campaign conditional on a British refusal to accept self-government by 31 December 1929. Imperialism had a year in which to prepare. In March 1929, all the most prominent leaders of the Indian working class, including the entire leadership of the Red Flag Union, were arrested and taken to Meerut, detained on a charge of 'attempting to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of India'. At a crucial stage in the liberation struggle, the working class movement had been decapitated.

The election of the Labour government in May 1929 brought no change to British policy. Gandhi made no response when his deadline was passed, although there were vast demonstrations on Independence Day, 30 January 1930. In the meantime, the government took the precaution of detaining the leading left wing nationalist Subhas Bose. Finally, Gandhi announced a march on Dandi by a select band of followers to make salt in defiance of the government monopoly, to be followed by a campaign of non-co-operation. On 6 April, Gandhi made his salt and the movement exploded once more, as peasants interpreted non-co-operation to mean non-payment of rent as well as taxes. The town of Peshawar fell into the hands of the people following hundreds of deaths and casualties at the hands of loyal troops. But one incident stood out:

'Two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garwhali Rifles, Hindu troops in the midst of a Moslem crowd, refused the order to fire, broke ranks, fraternised with the crowd, and a number handed over their arms. Immediately after this, the military and police were withdrawn from Peshawar; from 25 April to 4 May the city was in the hands of the people.' (Palme Dutt: *India Today*, 1940)

At Sholapur in Bombay, the workers took over the administration for a week. Under Labour's direction, the response of the government was brutal, creating a condition akin to martial law. Congress was banned in June, and Gandhi arrested. In the 10 months up to April 1931, between 60,000 and 90,000 people were arrested. Physical terror was the norm: between 1 April and 14 July alone, 24 incidents of firing had left 103 dead and 420 wounded; by the end of June, the RAF had dropped over 500 tons of bombs in quelling the disturbances.

GANDHI AND 'THE ALTERNATIVE'

The Simon Commission reported in June 1930, offering no significant concession, merely fuelling the anger. In an effort to break the impasse, Labour convened a 'Round Table Confer-

ence', inviting representatives from the three British parliamentary parties, some Indian merchants, industrialists and landowners and various feudal puppets from the Indian princely states. Opening it in January 1931, MacDonald declared that 'I pray that by our labours, India will possess... the pride and the honour of Responsible Self-Government', an offer which committed the government to nothing.

It was however enough for Gandhi; in March he persuaded Congress first to call off the mass campaign for a few petty concessions, and then to participate in the Conference it had sworn to boycott. He demanded no preconditions about self-government or home rule, only that the oppressive ordinances were to be withdrawn, and prisoners released — except those guilty of 'violence' or 'incitement to violence', or soldiers guilty of disobeying orders. This formula allowed Labour and Gandhi to exclude the Meerut detainees, a group of Sikh revolutionaries who were forthwith hanged, and 17 soldiers from the Garwhali Rifles, who were given severe sentences. With that, Gandhi was released to attend the Round Table Conference, a charade that continued for a year without resolution. As a contemporary Communist wrote:

'Hanging, flogging, slaying, shooting and bombing attest the efforts of parasitic imperialism to cling to the body of its victim. The Round Table Conference beside these efforts is like the ceremonial mumblings of the priest that walks behind the hangman.'

There were sound reasons for Labour's intransigence: the tribute from India ran at £120 to £150 million per annum (see box). As the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out in 1930, 'There are two chief reasons why a self-regarding England may hesitate to relax her control over India. The first is that her influence in the past depends partly upon her power to summon troops and to draw resources from India in time of need [such as £180 million in gold the British government unilaterally removed from India to bolster sterling between October 1931 and March 1932]...The second is that Great Britain finds in India her best market, and she has £1,000 million of capital invested there.'

A Naesmith, Secretary of the Weaver's Amalgamation, the largest textile union in Britain, echoed this view from the standpoint of the interests of the labour aristocracy when he told a mass meeting 'they desired to see India and her people take their rightful place in the community of nations, but not at the expense of the industrial and economic life of Lancashire and those dependent on it.'

It had needed a Labour Government to re-establish British control over India. There is no more savage indictment of Labour than in its crushing of the Indian struggle of 1928-31. Under a fog of democratic phrases, it acted savagely. It destroyed any chance of the Indian working class playing a significant role in the Indian liberation movement, which from then on became the plaything of different bourgeois interests. In a debate in 1930, an Independent Labour Party MP, WJ Brown, made a prophetic point when he told parliament 'I venture to suggest that we should regard it as a cardinal feature of British policy to carry Gandhi with us, for if we do not, we have to face the alternative to Gandhi, and that is organised violence and revolutionary effort.'

Those wishing to learn more about British rule in India can do no better than read *India Today* by R Palme Dutt, Left Book Club, 1940. This is still widely available in second hand bookshops and public libraries.

In the second part of this article, Robert Clough will trace the course of the struggle from 1931 to 1947.

Rock around the Blockade goes to World Youth Festival

At the end of July, Rock around the Blockade sent a contingent of 11 socialists on the 100-strong British delegation to the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students in Havana. The contingent was made up of students, teachers and two health workers involved in drugs and alcohol rehabilitation work with young people in Manchester.

The contingent took with them thousands of copies of a statement on the situation facing young people in capitalist Britain. It points out Britain's imperialist history, especially in relation to Ireland and highlights issues such as health, education, housing, unemployment and the effects of a society dedicated to consumerism. What it shows is how, behind capitalism's facade of plenty, lies a yawning gulf between rich and poor.

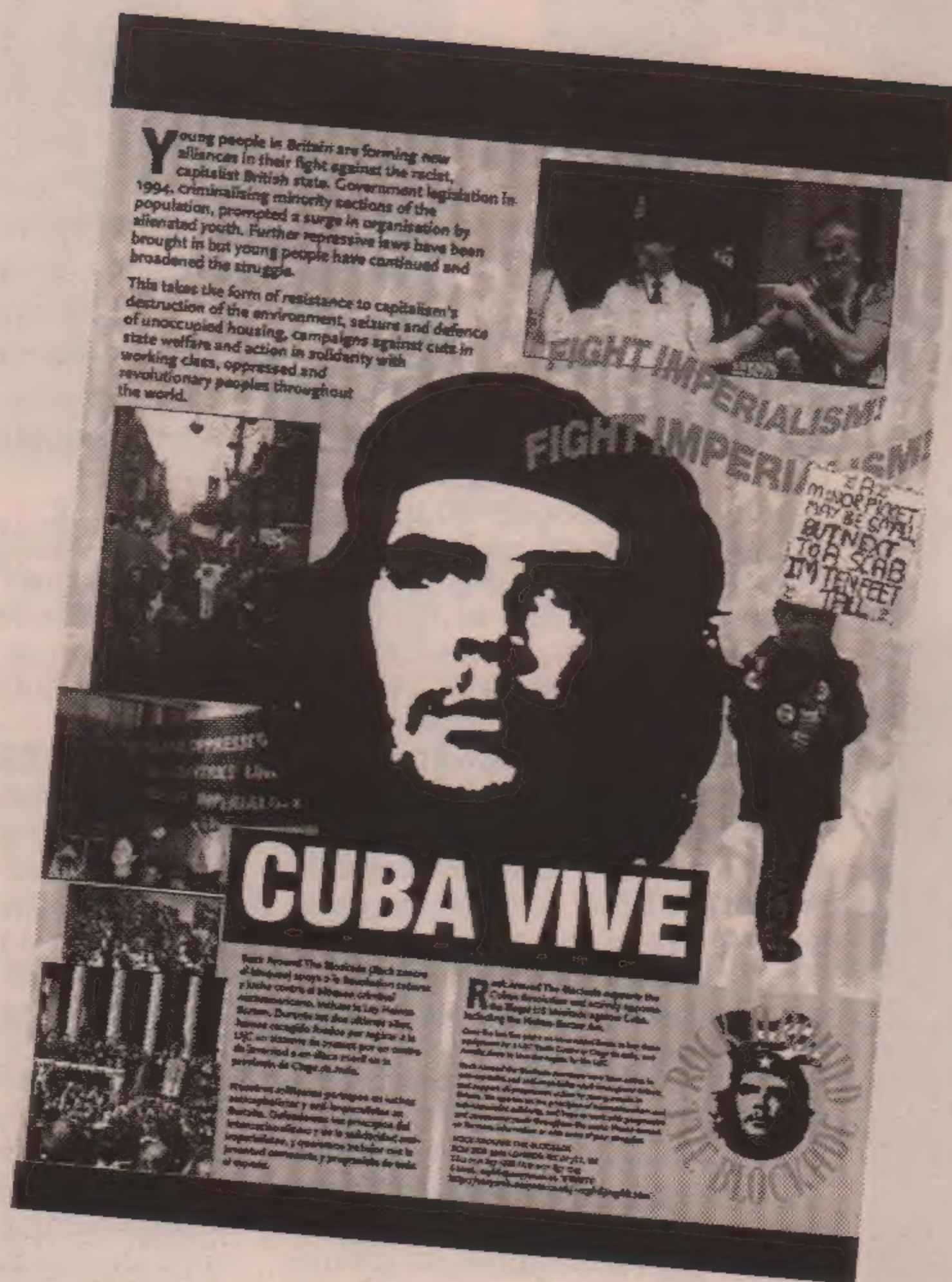
Some of those involved had organised a magnificent fundraising social at Bristol University, with leading band Up Bustle & Out, which attracted hundreds of students and raised just over £1,000 for Rock around the Blockade. We look forward to our link with the band continuing as we build for their tour of universities and colleges in the autumn and launch their new album to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. Other Rock around the Blockade activists took part in the March for Jobs that culminated in Amsterdam on 1 July. Meanwhile, Rock around the Blockade has continued with its regular campaign meetings in Manchester and London and street stalls, petitioning and day-schools. We contributed 25

boxes of computer and medical aid to the Container Appeal for Cuba organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and held a successful stall at their fiesta.

We have also, as founding members of the British Preparatory Committee for the World Festival (BPC), worked over the last six months to build as broad and representative a delegation from Britain as possible and to raise money for the International Fund, to which we contributed £500. However, the work of the BPC was held back by the fact that organising the British delegation was left to a handful of comrades from three or four organisations, most notably BPC secretary, Kenny Coyle of the Young Communist League. It is regrettable that having made a song and dance about its power, size and influence, the Scottish TUC was only able to muster a donation of £250 to the International Fund and send fewer than 20 delegates to the World Festival.

Rock around the Blockade operates on principles of internationalism and anti-imperialist solidarity; the World Festival, which takes place in Havana between 28 July and 5 August, offers a unique opportunity to make links with young people from countries all over the world involved in anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles.

Also in August, three comrades from FRFI will be attending a conference on globalisation organised by the Congreso de Trabajadores Cubanos, the Cuban trade union congress. We will be holding a reportback meeting on the World Festival on Saturday 30 August. Contact the campaign for details.



We will be holding a torchlit commemoration on the steps of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London at 6.30pm on Wednesday 8 October to mark the 30th anniversary of the death of Che Guevara, murdered by CIA-backed soldiers in Bolivia in 1967.

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign will be holding a demonstration against the US blockade in early October - details still to be announced.

Campaign meetings are held fortnightly in London on Mondays at 7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube Holborn). Next meetings: 28 July, 11 August, 1 September, 15 September.

For more information or to join Rock around the Blockade contact: Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688

Commemorate the 30th anniversary of Che Guevara's death...



...with our classic campaign t-shirt - red and black design of Che Guevara and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back. Still available for only £7 inc p+p. Please specify XL, M, S. Badges are 50p.

I would like to order _____ t-shirt(s) and _____ badge(s) and enclose £ _____ (cheques/POs to Rock around the Blockade) Donation to campaign £ _____ Total £ _____

Name _____ Address _____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

of the Caravan fasted for 94 days to get 450 computers released by US Customs. Everyone in Cuba knows about this. So if you come with Pastors for Peace, arms are opened wide to receive you. The children especially gave us a warm welcome, because the aid was dedicated to them. We visited schools, a pioneers' palace, and the camp set up to treat the Chernobyl children. When you think that, in spite of the medical shortages due to the blockade, Cuba can still treat thousands of children from Chernobyl completely free of charge, as an act of solidarity, it's amazing. It was a very moving experience. We also visited schools, industrial centres, hospitals, farms and the neighbourhood Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, which put on a huge street party for us - a great demonstration of resistance to the blockade and the Helms-Burton Act.

Many of those on the Caravan and amongst Pastors for Peace were the poor and disadvantaged who suffer at the hands of their own government. So they identify readily with Cuba which also suffers at the hands of the US. They see the Revolution as setting an example not just for the continent but for the rest of the world. And they know it is in their interests as they fight for socialism in their own country to have this example of Cuba shining like a beacon. So they would definitely link their struggles on behalf of Cuba with their struggles back home.

I support Cuba because for me it is the one example in today's world of what it is to be a socialist society. I'm so impressed by what I have seen of Cuba's achievements and so appalled by what the USA is attempting to do in destroying that Revolution. I feel it's in the interests of all of us to fight on behalf of Cuba as we fight for socialism back home. As other developing countries are subjected to the neoliberal policies of the IMF and World Bank, Cuba meanwhile hasn't thrown anybody on the scrapheap, it hasn't privatised everything wholesale, it hasn't cut back on public spending - in other words it hasn't sold out to the capitalists and therefore I think it is important to keep that Revolution going in order to advance the struggles of the rest of us worldwide.

Turkey's military appoints new government

ELIF MUTLUAY

Once again, Turkey's generals have made their presence felt on the political scene. The country has been through three coups in the past, in 1960, in 1971 and in 1980. 1997 is not 'officially' a coup - the military did not formally take over the government - but, in reality, it is a fully-fledged coup.

The coalition government, composed of the Islamist Welfare Party and the centre-right True Path Party has collapsed. After months of military-originated tension, ranging from tanks rolling through Islamist districts of Ankara to a series of 'briefings' to bureaucrats, journalists and judges, in which the Islamist wing of government was denounced, the government decided to speed up the transfer of the prime ministership from Necmettin Erbakan, Welfare Party leader, to Tansu Çiller, leader of the True Path Party. The president has the constitutional right to appoint the prime minister.

However, although precedent is to appoint the leader of the majority block, President Demirel took his cue from the generals who had imprisoned him after the 1980 military coup, and appointed Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party, instead. By this time, Yilmaz had, of course, discovered that getting along with the military was the only way to power. Another coalition was formed as the True Path deputies deserted the sinking ship.

The previous elections were already tainted because huge numbers of displaced people could not vote, and new registrations of 18 to 21-year-old workers were made impossible by allowing only two weeks for registration during working hours. Whatever claim to representativeness the previous parliament had, it is now a complete joke.

After Demirel appointed Yilmaz, and the military made more forceful statements, including that they would use arms if necessary, dozens of deputies resigned from the True Path Party to join the new government. The 'price' a deputy received for transferring is reported as US\$5 million. The government passed a vote of confidence, but it has no claim to being an elected government of a representative parliament.

Most significant are the issues which have been dropped from government agenda. The parliamentary commission on the Susurluk accident which exposed the Mafia and counter-guerilla links of deputies and police chiefs has 'completed' its job, producing almost nothing after supposedly listening to prolonged witness testimonies.

For a long time, there have been allegations that Çiller is in fact a US citizen, and worked for the CIA. There were also many claims that the counter-guerilla gang exposed by the Susurluk accident was first initiated and funded by the CIA. Apparently, Çiller will be the scapegoat. After the fall of the government, a case was filed

with the State Security Courts to investigate whether Çiller had spied for the US. While it was obvious that any spying she might have done would be connected with the Susurluk gang, there was a visible effort not to mention that issue.

The former minister of interior affairs, Meral Aksener, was also accused of spying on the military. The military has called for her prosecution. She defended herself by saying that there was real suspicion of a possible coup being planned. She named a group in the military code, called 'Western Work Group', as the planner of an illegal coup. The military replied by saying the 'Western Work Group' was a legal work group they had set up in order to investigate 'reactionary Islamist' activities. Meral Aksener was appointed by Çiller as a puppet minister to replace Mehmet Agar who had resigned after his signature was found on the gun permit and diplomatic passport issued to fugitive fascist Abdullah Catli, who died in the Susurluk accident. It was no secret that Aksener had no independence and she did everything under orders and with the permission of Çiller.

The new government now faces the problem of trying to 'punish' Çiller without touching upon the Susurluk Gang. Many of the Çiller corruption cases were brushed under the carpet by the Welfare-True Path coalition in return for Çiller's support. Now, they are selectively being brought to light again. Of course, the reason that the military is after her is certainly not because of any lack of toadying to the military on her part. In fact, the ex-chief of staff is still a deputy from her party. Çiller is another corrupt politician who pushed the limits of her 'independence' too far, due to a level of greed excessive even for Turkey with its notoriously corrupt politicians.

The new government immediately raised the price of petrol by 15% and didn't even promise to improve the brutal human rights record. In addition to the many authors, journalists, Kurdish politicians, and human rights activists already in gaol, Esber Yagmurdereli, a blind lawyer and prominent human rights activist is now threatened with a 19-year gaol sentence for a recent speech. There is no improvement in the case of the 'disappeared', although many witnesses to the parliamentary commission point to the Susurluk gang. Every Saturday, families and friends of the 'disappeared' continue to gather in Galatasaray, demanding that the murderers of their loved ones be brought to justice and that the bodies be found.

The new government is ignoring the demands of the majority of the country's population - the workers, the Kurds, the poor people who live in the slums of the cities, the unemployed. Instead, it is enthusiastically meeting the demands of the military. After all, the people did not elect this government, the military did.

Friendship to Cuba - eyewitness report

Pastors for Peace, a US-based project under the umbrella of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organisation, has organised seven Friendshipships of material aid to Cuba since 1992 in opposition to the US blockade, and risking arrest, imprisonment and confiscation of goods, and challenging public ignorance about US policy towards Cuba. It involves progressive people from all walks of life; its mainstay is the Baptist church, based in the US black community. Father Geoffrey Bottoms, chair of Preston & Blackburn Cuba Solidarity Campaign, joined this year's Friendshipship, dedicated to children of Cuba. Here he speaks to FRFI about his experience.

Ellen Bernstein of Pastors for Peace invited me to join the next Friendshipship Caravan

during a speaking tour in March. I travelled with Tony Cacavone - the now famous taxi driver who has painted his cab in the colours of the Cuban flag. We set off from New York and immediately Customs played rough with Tony's taxi. They held onto it till the last moment, and when we collected it they had deflated the tyres, scratched the paintwork and stolen the radio. Many of the people we met on the journey towards the Mexican border were entirely ignorant of what their government is doing to the people of Cuba. There is a conspiracy of silence in the reporting of issues around Cuba.

The welcome in Cuba, however, is always warm, especially when people stand in solidarity with their Revolution. Pastors for Peace is widely respected, from Fidel Castro down. Last year, for example, five members

Bleak prospects in Sierra Leone

In March 1995, FRFI carried an article on Sierra Leone which focused on the role of multinationals and a succession of corrupt governments in bleeding dry this once prosperous land and pushing its people to the brink of a barbaric full-scale civil war. The bleak forecast made then has come to pass. In this follow-up CHARINE JOHN traces the grim developments.

Sierra Leone, a former British colony which grew out of settlement of freed slaves, is rich in gold, diamonds, titanium and bauxite, and naturally beautiful with lush rainforests and a breathtaking coastline. It should have become one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Yet its population had a life expectancy of 42 years and an appalling literacy rate of 13%: this in a country whose university had once been dubbed 'the Athens of West Africa'.

A history of corruption

The recent history of Sierra Leone has been scarred by a succession of corrupt governments who squandered its natural resources in favour of personal pay-offs from multinational companies and who greedily pocketed money destined for aid projects. This greed can be directly blamed for the 'rebel' war in 1991 which began as an overspill from the conflict in neighbouring Liberia. Politicians had created a climate in which civilians were no more than dispensable cheap fodder, kept uneducated and unhealthy. Tribalism and ignorance were encouraged making it possible for the civil war to break out; a war which over five years killed more than 10,000 people out of a population of four million, and which left more than a third of the population homeless.

The civil war was the impetus for a military coup in 1992, when 25-year-old Valentine Strasser and his cohorts seized power. They represented a section of the army rank and file who were disaffected. Grossly underpaid and under-equipped, the army had resorted to the use of child soldiers and often mas-

queraded as rebels, looting from and executing the civilians they were meant to protect. Strasser's government failed to end the war, and he left the country to study at Warwick University!

Elections

In February 1996, despite attacks by soldiers and rebels, elections were successfully held. For a short while, prospects improved despite the so-called rebel war, led by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which, since 1991, had been ravaging the countryside. Lawyer Ahmed Tejan Kabba of the Sierra Leone People's Party (the party which had led Sierra Leone into independence in 1961) won the election, gaining 27 out of 80 seats in the new parliament. Although this was hardly a landslide, Kabba's party set out to win the hearts and minds of the downtrodden populace. Repairs to the country's ravaged infrastructure started - friends began to write to me that the telephone system was being repaired, electricity supplied to domestic premises, streets were cleaned, roads repaired. While this may seem trivial, it represented something we Sierra Leoneans felt we had lost - hope for the future.

The latest coup

Late in May this year, however, Sierra Leoneans once again awoke to the sound of gunfire. The gates to the main prison at Padema Road where the plotters had been held, were busted down and the rebels with about 600 other criminals were set free. A previously unknown army major, Johnny Paul Koroma, declared himself coup leader. He publicly decried the possibility of foreign (Nigerian)



intervention to restore democracy, claiming that the coup was an 'internal matter', and invited the brutal RUF leader Sankoh, currently in detention in Nigeria, to join his regime. It later emerged that Koroma had himself been in Padema Road prison charged with treason and had been due to appear in court the following day. The coup leaders then proved their calibre by rampaging through Freetown, looting, raping and even murdering civilians, firing RPGs, destroying the national treasury, closing the national airport and imposing a strict curfew.

After the US Embassy was hit twice by RPGs, and two US citizens wounded by stray fire, the US decided to evacuate its citizens. Foreign nationals mostly made their way to the beach-side Mammy Yoko hotel, which was protected by Nigerian troops who were in the country as part of a defence pact against the rebels. Kabba fled to neighbouring Guinea, from where he appealed to the international community to intervene to help restore democracy. The coup was immediately condemned by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan. Although the US evacuation started quickly, it came too late for some foreigners. A number of European

women were attacked and raped alongside Sierra Leoneans. One British woman reported that the British High Commission had barricaded its doors and when she contacted them for help after being raped, was told to 'sit tight'.

As we go to press, the international community, having evacuated most Europeans and US citizens, has forgotten about Sierra Leone. Reports are that the coup leaders are no closer to establishing 'order' and supplies of all necessities are depleted. Despite repeated appeals from Kabba, the only external help has come from the Nigerian government, whose attacks have so far been repulsed. It is ironic that help should come from a brutal military regime which has recently cancelled its own elections, yet Nigeria has given more aid to restore democracy than the OAU, the UN and the rest of the international community combined. Sierra Leone has now joined Nigeria as the only countries suspended from Commonwealth membership.

Having belatedly condemned the coup, it remains to be seen whether the Blair government will view with any sympathy the plight of Sierra Leonean refugees, or if we will see a repeat of the hysteria with which Major and the British press greeted refugees from the last outbreak of fighting.

Kenya in turmoil

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

President Daniel Arap Moi's regime in Kenya is being shaken by a wave of popular protests, street demonstrations, university occupations and violent civilian clashes with the police and the army. From 8 to 17 July Kenyan police murdered at least 10 demonstrators as protests swept across the capital Nairobi, the main port Mombasa, Thika, Nyahururu and elsewhere. 'Spokesmen' for the opposition and most media commentators highlighted 'respectable' demands for constitutional reforms prior to the planned elections later in the year. Whilst such demands do express the interests of significant elements of the opposition to Arap Moi's regime, they conceal the far more profound social volcano rumbling beneath bourgeois constitutional politics. Indeed the 'respectable' opposition's emphasis on constitutional reform are a means of controlling and diverting this social volcano to serve not popular aspirations, but narrow capitalist interests.

The basis for the growing and active popular opposition to Moi is the failure of capitalism in Kenya. In this 'model' of 'free-enterprise and democracy' in Africa 'more and more people are sinking below the poverty

nonsense is very high... It deters tourists, it deters investors'. The governor of the Bank of Kenya reiterated the point: 'Investor confidence is being eroded every day... If things escalated there will be capital flight...'

This is the morality of capitalism. For capitalism and its representatives the hunger and poverty forcing thousands into protest at the risk of their lives is mere 'nonsense eroding investor confidence'. They are seeking to put an end to this 'nonsense' by forcing Moi, on pain of withdrawing financial assistance, to negotiate with and make 'constitutional' concessions to the bourgeois leadership of the opposition National Convention Executive Committee (NCEC). They hope such a concession will stabilise the social situation. As yet, the masses, the poor, have no independent and powerful voice of their own and it is left to the NCEC to posture as the representative of the people. It is not.

Its political and social class standpoint was expressed by John Githongo from the *East African Newspaper* 'The middle classes just want to be left in peace to make money... (Under Moi) they see no avenues for self-advancement. Moi has killed hope.' Such an outlook cannot express the interests of the masses. Indeed, it is so narrow and selfish as to have riddled the 'respectable' oppo-



line' writes the *Financial Times*. Income per head stands at £166 a year. The number of child beggars in Nairobi increases each week. Hundreds of thousands are condemned to unemployment and to live in grim shanty towns amidst rotting rubbish heaps. In Kenya according to the *Financial Times* there is a 'chasm between rich and poor wider than in any country in the world apart from Brazil... The top 10% enjoys 47% of Kenya's national income.' This situation has driven even sections of the middle classes into opposition as their standard of living has steadily declined.

Kenya is on the edge of a veritable social explosion in which the 'have-nots' are attempting to enter the stage and take what is due to them. Moi's international backers, headed by Britain, and international capitalist banking and financial institutions do not like this one little bit. They are not concerned about the mass poverty, the hunger, the unemployment and shanty housing which makes life a nightmare for the majority. They show no interest in addressing these problems. They are concerned about the threat to the profits on their investments. Mr Harold Wackman of the World Bank expressed their standpoint precisely: 'The economic cost of this

situation with debilitating divisions and factionalism. This has worried the *Financial Times* for 'given the level of public discontent, the absence of a charismatic leader to polarise and channel protest carries its own dangers'.

These are the 'dangers' of an uncontrolled anti-capitalist social struggle. The Kenyan people have a long and outstanding tradition of revolutionary mass protest dating from the Mau Mau struggle against British colonialism. This tradition of working class and peasant struggle, which has been brutally repressed under both Kenyatta's and Arap Moi's regimes, has not however been destroyed. The poor, the hungry and the dispossessed will not be satisfied with purely 'constitutional' or 'democratic' reforms which will merely replace one stratum of privileged capitalists and their hangers-on with another. Calling upon their past traditions and creating new ones, they will strive to secure their social liberation from capitalist parasites, both domestic and international. To help them succeed the least we can do in Britain is demand an end to British backing for the Moi regime and an end to all British interference in Kenyan political life.

Labour government must release Kani Yilmaz

TREVOR RAYNE

As we go to press, the European representative of the Kurdistan Workers Party, Kani Yilmaz, remains in Belmarsh prison. Home Secretary Jack Straw has the power to quash the extradition order to Germany and is said to be considering his case. Kani Yilmaz was seized by Metropolitan police on 26 October 1994 outside the Houses of Parliament on his way to address parliamentarians at their request. He has remained in British gaols since. The House of Lords appeal against extradition was rejected in June, without explanation.

Kani Yilmaz was an open political figure representing the

Kurds in a diplomatic capacity; visiting many European countries, meeting senior political figures and government ministers. He was a regular visitor to Britain and on the occasion of his arrest had been invited by the Labour MP for Erith and Thamesmead, John Austin-Walker, in whose constituency Kani Yilmaz is now incarcerated in Belmarsh prison.

Former Home Secretary Michael Howard justified imprisoning Kani Yilmaz under the National Security Act, claiming he was a 'threat to national security'. This was a political act carried out at the request of the Turkish government in pursuit of a military defeat of the Kurdish people.

In the nearly three years of his imprisonment, parliamen-



Kani Yilmaz

tarians have been ineffective in raising the Kani Yilmaz case, and the Kurds have been left almost alone to protest. On 25 June Kurds demonstrated outside the Home Office for his release. MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Cynog Dafis, Fire Brigades Union leader Ken Cameron, Frances Webber from CARF and the RCG came to give messages of support. We urge readers and supporters to contact your MPs and MEPs to ask the Home Secretary to stop the extradition and order a review. Anything less than Kani Yilmaz's release places the Labour Government in support of the war against the Kurds.



Turkish soldiers in Istanbul: Britain has imprisoned Kani Yilmaz to aid the war against the Kurds

STATE REPRESSION

In some ways the British police haven't changed a bit. In a review of the findings of the Policy Studies Institute report, *Police and People in London*, in November 1983, *The Economist* wrote:

'Under his peculiar Victorian Helmet, your ordinary London bobby is racist, sexist, bored, aimless and quite often drunk.'

Fourteen years later, the police force still pretends to be concerned about the racism and sexism which, it openly admits, festers in its ranks: it just fails to do anything about it. What *has* changed are the powers which these bigots possess in law. For, since 1981, the British state has systematically transformed the police in one respect – they are now organised and equipped both legally and in paramilitary terms to deal with political dissent by overwhelming force. On the receiving end of this transformation has been a generation of workers, black people and political activists – in 1984-5 it was the striking miners and the Broadwater Farm Estate, today it is road and environmental protesters. The British state is tooling up and honing its powers for future confrontations with the working class and its allies. CAROL BRICKLEY reports.

In the February/March issue of FRFI (135) we reprinted an article from 1983 which described the beginning of this transformation process: from the fiction of 'policing by consent' using 'minimum force', to the reality of paramilitary policing. A shattering series of uprisings in Britain's inner cities in the Spring and Summer of 1981 were the catalyst. In Brixton and Toxteth the police almost lost control faced by the determined outrage of local people at police racism. By September 1981, Kenneth Newman had moved from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) to Metropolitan Police Commissioner. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) – an unregulated, non-statutory body of Chief Constables and Deputies – organised an emergency session on Public Order Policing at its annual, secret conference.

Three forces addressed the emergency session: the Met Police, the RUC, and the Royal Hong Kong Police (RHKP). Two of these, the RUC and the RHKP, were expert at suppressing sections of the local population by force, using methods refined in British colonies the world over.

The keynote speech was delivered by Richard Quine, Director of Operations for the RHKP. The attraction for ACPO was the RHKP's experience as a paramilitary force organised to suppress rebellion and trade union activity in the colony. Hong Kong was not a democracy until it became convenient for the British in the run-up to the 1997 Chinese take-over. Its people were ruled as a subject people and the RHKP riot squad was the force trained to keep them in subjection. The plastic bullet was developed from the 'bamboo baton round', a favourite RHKP weapon.

From this conference, with the support of the Home Office, ACPO organised a full review of public order policing. This resulted in the formation of the Public Order Forward Planning Unit to co-ordinate policing on a national basis, and the production of the secret ACPO *Public Order and Tactical Options Manual*, cataloguing repressive organisation and restraint techniques. These techniques were designed, in the words of the Met's magazine *The Job*, to give the impression of 'visual non-violence'. Brigadier Mike Harvey, a Korean war veteran who developed arrest and restraint methods in the north of Ireland was brought in to train the Met police.

In short, there had been a radical change in policing methods in Britain, without the slightest reference to any democratic process. 'Gerry Northam sums it up in his book *Shooting in the Dark*:

'ACPO has taken great care to shroud its new policy in secrecy. It is difficult to see this as a sign of faith in public support. It suggests, to the contrary, that a profound shift in thinking has taken place among some senior police officers which leads them to treat

parts of Britain like colonies. Tactics which were previously reserved for use against subject peoples overseas, are now considered appropriate for the control of British citizens at home. Whether or not it was ever morally right to employ them for foreign suppression, the decision to import these tactics into

tion. A paramilitary policing strategy would be necessary to deal with 'the enemy in our midst'. That enemy was the working class: on the one hand, the dispossessed inner city youth, denied opportunity, choked by discrimination and on the receiving end of police racism; on the other hand, the industrial



Orgreave June 1984

domestic policing is of the greatest political significance. ACPO has decided in secret that part of Britain's population should be treated, on occasion, like hostile aliens. Can they avoid the conclusion that, for some purposes, it is no longer their intention to police by consent.' (p139)

No one should be surprised at this 'shift'. The police force and the law has always been used against political dissent. Special Branch was formed in the 19th century to combat Fenian bombings in London and to co-ordinate police work on Ireland. The 1936 Public Order Act, purported to be in opposition to the British Union of Fascists (BUF), was first used against striking miners in Nottinghamshire. It was hardly ever used against the fascists, even when the stewards at one BUF meeting threw an opponent out of the doors, face down on to stone steps, in full view of the police. 'Policing by consent' is the creature of more quiescent periods. Nonetheless, the decision to adopt paramilitary policing methods in 1981 represented the recognition by the ruling class that the post-war boom had ended: class confrontation was now on the agenda again.

ACPO's strategy was undoubtedly promoted by its political masters – the Thatcher government. The Tories knew that the direct result of their plans in favour of finance capital and the free market would be confronta-

workers, soon to be dispossessed themselves, when Thatcher's government destroyed British manufacturing industry, throwing millions on to the dole.

Newman, in his first annual report as Met Commissioner, targeted inner city London communities – predominantly black – as in need of 'special' policing. He put London 'on notice' to expect police violence directed at 'alienated' communities. But it was in 1984/5 that Britain's new paramilitary police were to be really tested – during the Miners' Strike and on Broadwater Farm Estate in London.

The Miners' Strike was the big test of the new strategy. The police were organised nationally to block motorways and roads to halt free movement of strikers and their supporters; whole mining communities were isolated, held under siege and harassed; massed riot squads were marshalled at pit-heads to attack the pickets, snatch individuals, intimidate, brutalise and criminalise the strikers. The lackey media launched a campaign of vilification – lying about the violence of the strikers, promoting the strike breakers and the police. At Orgreave, television footage was reversed to give the impression that the massed ranks of riot police were simply defending themselves from attack by the pickets – the complete opposite of the truth. Indeed it was not until the Orgreave riot trial in July 1985 that the existence of the *Tactical Options Manual* was

leaked. It was only after this that extracts were placed in the House of Commons Library – the first that Parliament knew about it.

The Newman/Kitson (see FRFI 135) strategy to eliminate dissent was followed to the letter: first, isolate the dissidents; second, recruit the moderates to support the State/Police; third, crush the opposition with force – the riot squad and courts. To do this they used intelligence gathering (eg, surveillance, bugging, spying) and 'psychological operations' (disinformation and dirty tricks) to confuse and discredit the opposition. That is why the media accused miners' leader Scargill of corruption. The Labour Party and trade union leadership were willing helpers in the campaign: Kinnoch and Willis teamed up to attack the strikers for violence and to block vital support. They were silent on the radical change in policing used to crush the strike.

Broadwater Farm Estate in the Autumn of 1985 was to provide the second opportunity to test the new tactics. Within a short time of the outbreak of anger following the death of a local woman, Mrs Jarrett, during a police raid, thousands of police were mobilised into riot squads. Residents were held under siege for weeks after the event, flats were raided and snatch squads picked up black youths. Selective leaks to the press recruited public support for the police action, ensuring that those arrested would not get a fair trial. Juveniles were brutally treated under interrogation and the

police violence.

Perhaps the laws and the riot police were enough to deal with the clashes of the 1980s. But the State is continually revising its plans for dealing with opposition, the more so since it expects dissent to deepen and widen. The recent tranche of legislation is not just the product of the depraved imaginations of Tory MPs. Viewed as a whole, it is a systematic escalation of police powers in order to deal with the crisis to come.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 – hailed as progressive for its reduction in the age of consent for homosexuals – in fact targets young people, their culture and their political activities for 'special policing'. Ravers, squatters, environmental protesters, hunt saboteurs are all criminalised. The Act also removed the right to silence and further restricted the right to peaceful assembly.

The Security Services Act 1996 and the more recent Police Act (which is awaiting completion virtually unamended by the new Labour Government) have introduced fresh powers of surveillance, bugging, and breaking and entering without judicial warrant. Communities may welcome the use of closed circuit television cameras (CCTV) on the grounds that it prevents crime, but CCTV has a far more important part in the strategy of the state to prevent and crush opposition. Surveillance does not stop there: government departments can now share the information they hold about individuals, and 'employers can demand to see employees' criminal records.

These laws are ostensibly for use to combat 'serious crime', but the definition of 'serious crime' includes 'conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose'. This is the old conspiracy law. It is not intended for use against the massed ranks of the ruling class heading for Ascot; it is the catch-all law for crushing working class opposition to the State.

Intrinsic to the paramilitarisation of the police and the laws that go with it, is the constant blurring of any demarcation between criminal activity and political dissent. The *Tactical Options Manual* continually and deliberately uses the terms criminal and protester interchangeably. Political activity outside and beyond the corrupt activities of Parliament (treated as criminal) is being criminalised.

Reclaim the Streets has been subject to repeated raids, surveillance and confiscation of their computer disks. Small demonstrations, called at short notice, are now attended by police in riot gear. 20,000 copies of *Evading Standards* – a mock edition of the *Evening Standard* – produced on the eve of the March for Social Justice in April, were confiscated by police who were waiting at the delivery point. Road campaigners are spied on – the £2.2 million that the Department of Transport have been paying a detective agency to spy on activists will be saved now that the police can do the job. The Forward Intelligence Unit – part of the Public Order Unit at the Met – can hardly wait to test its old and new powers: 'if a particular environmental cause were to spread countrywide, then mutual aid on a scale not seen since the miners' dispute might once again be required.' (Chief Superintendent Davies, *Police Review* 21 March 1997).

CS gas is in general use against hunt saboteurs and even against working class mothers trying to stop their children being taken into care. The police are armed to the teeth with long batons and guns for use against their old enemy – the now even more alienated inner city youth – especially if they are black. A few 'liberal' Chief Constables may be shocked that fellows are so bigoted, but the majority know that it is an essential feature of policing the crisis.

We have no illusions that Labour will change this – their only loyalty is to the British State and their own class. Our job is to build united opposition to the hired liars in the media, the opportunists in government and the thugs who police political opposition on their behalf. ■

New control unit opens at Woodhill

INSIDE NEWS

In autumn 1997 a new Control Unit will open at Woodhill prison in Milton Keynes. Up to 50 'subversive' prisoners will be located there. JOHN BOWDEN examines the iniquitous history of control units within the British prison system.

Wakefield

The original control unit experiment opened at Wakefield in 1974. Planned under the Heath Conservative government, it was taken over by Wilson's Labour Party. The unit was shrouded in secrecy, with neither parliament nor the media told of plans to ghost 'trouble-makers' into a purpose-built 'behaviour modification' unit, where they would be subjected to a regime of clinical isolation and crude Pavlovian psychology. Eventually, however, the truth seeped out, due principally to the efforts of certain prisoners in the unit to instigate legal action against the Home Office, alleging gross violation of their basic human rights. Amid the resulting public disquiet, the unit was closed and the 'experiment' abandoned.

The Wakefield unit control strategy followed the nationwide prison disturbances of 1972 when prisoners throughout the system collectively organised coordinated protests in support of greater basic rights. These demonstrations were highly politicised and inspired the first ever national prisoners' movement in Britain - PROP (Preservation of the Rights of Prisoners).

1972 was a revolutionary year in the history of the prison struggle in Britain and reflected a much wider radicalisation of prisoners throughout western Europe and north America, following the state massacre of prisoners at Attica in 1971.

Inevitably, the Home Office claimed that a tiny group of hard-core trouble-makers and psychopaths were responsible for the disturbances. Besides seeking to deflect public attention away from the real causes of the unrest, this approach also paved the way for the creation of 'special facilities' for the recalcitrant few.

The storm of 1972 was weathered by the authorities, although it created in its wake a general liberalisation of conditions for long-term prisoners and a recognition that prisoners were capable of dynamic, focused and self-empowering organisation when sufficiently angry and desperate.

The Control Review Committee

The 1983 high-profile protest at Albany was the context for the second attempt to set up a control unit experiment in Britain. The government formed the Control Review Committee (CRC), composed of Home Office employees and legitimising academics, with a brief to formulate a coherent strategy of tighter, more effective control of long-term prisoners. The CRC concluded that the policy of dispersing 'high risk' prisoners among a relatively large group of maximum security gaols (the 'dispersal system') had failed and recommended the creation of one or two 'New Generation' prisons, forerunners of the US-style Supermax insti-

tutions, purpose-built for maximum control and containment. The report also pushed hard for the recreation of special control units for particularly hard-core trouble-makers, although it was careful to stress that the behaviour modification techniques would differ radically from those employed at Wakefield in 1974. These new units would not, it was stressed, attempt to break or subdue prisoners but would instead pacify and persuade them into conformity by a soft, almost therapeutic approach, along the lines of the Barlinnie Special Unit in Scotland.

The regimes in the resultant units at Lincoln, Hull and Parkhurst were an ambivalent mix of 'close supervision' and liberal rhetoric, and in most there eventually prevailed a precarious balance of power between staff determined to exercise total authority and prisoners equally determined to see the liberal rhetoric translated into practice. This often resulted in irresolvable conflict and the eventual closure of the Lincoln unit.

Woodhill

Michael Howard's time at the Home Office ushered in a new dark age for prisoners' rights and an obsession with north American methods of repression. An integral part of the current strategy of all-pervading 'security' and control is the determination to totally isolate and subdue 'subversive' prisoners and those considered capable of organising collective resistance. There are presently over 50 prisoners on the Continuous Assessment circuit. Continuous Assessment is a euphemism for the strategy of continually moving targeted 'trouble-makers' from seg-



Parkhurst special unit: a view from the inside

Of the three units initially created under the auspices of the CRC, only the Hull Special Unit is still operational. The Lincoln Special Unit opened in 1987 and was closed just a few years later, following constant protest by prisoners within the unit and the Parkhurst 'psychiatric unit' was closed by the Prison Service in 1995. Prisoners previously held at Parkhurst are still being warehoused at various prisons and can probably expect to end up at Woodhill. JAMES FINN spent several years in the Parkhurst unit and has written this account of the particular methods employed there:

In the unit, totally self-contained and isolated from the main prison, a regime designed with the assistance of psychologists was soon implemented: specially selected guards, 'non-confrontational environment', full time psychiatric and psychological counsellors, access to selected education courses, relaxation of petty rules and restrictions rife elsewhere in the prison system, basic skills training and hobby facilities. This was the scenario which greeted newly arriving prisoners, most of whom arrived directly from solitary confinement blocks where they had been held for periods ranging from a few months to up to two years.

What was not immediately apparent was the experimental programme of 'management control', which at Parkhurst relied heavily on legalised abuse of highly addictive, behaviour modifying drugs, presented in the guise of 'progressive therapy'.

In the first couple of months while new arrivals were 'left alone to settle down', psychiatric and psychological teams were busy compiling detailed psychological profiles on them using information from prison records or gathered indirectly during 'confidential' interviews. Also used were observations of reactions to 'situations' secretly set up for just such a purpose. Each prisoner was then presented with their own 'programme of objectives'.

Programmes tended to be designed specifically for the individual but in general applied basic psychological/psychiatric principles and methods geared towards behaviour modification and 'conformity to prison rules'. They were presented to the prisoner in various guises dependent upon what they actually contained, eg 'a need to address offending behaviour' could in fact be an attempt to elicit some admission to a crime always denied.

Central to all these programmes was an insistence on some form of drug therapy. Some men were already taking medication, usually to overcome difficulties sleeping, caused by the intense pressure of trying to survive isolated in some of Britain's most brutal prisons, and the introduction of 'new and better treatments' did not present much of a problem for the authorities, although some men did in fact resist the 'new' drugs and quietly disappeared from the units.

For those with no drug history, the authorities found other ways to get them to accept the idea of drugs as central to their well-being: for example sending them for extended spells of solitary in out-of-the-way local prisons, where visits were impossible, where mail was continuously 'lost', sleep deliberately denied for days on end, food soiled, property destroyed or stolen. This would continue until the prisoner accepted the course of drugs, whereby he would find himself suddenly back in the unit; if he continued to refuse there would be endless months in solitary being transferred from one prison to another, from one end of the county to the other...

regation unit to segregation unit every 28 days or so. Segregation units in the main long-term prisons are also being used to house 'difficult' prisoners for months, even years, at a time. The creation of an undisguised control unit at Woodhill signifies a return to the behaviour modification 'experiments' of the early 1970s, with the intention not just of isolating and punishing 'trouble-makers' but of actively trying to break and 'modify' their spirit of resistance. Prisoners selected for the Woodhill unit will be subjected to a regime deliberately designed to manipulate mood and behaviour by the infliction of psychological stress and denial of basic rights and privileges.

There has so far been absolutely no open public debate concerning the use of such cruel and unusual methods of control at Woodhill or the slightest official acknowledgement that the proposed regime raises legal questions concerning prisoners' human rights. Just as in 1974, a Labour government is continuing with the setting up of a control unit planned under a previous Conservative administration; once again it is shrouded in secrecy and public ignorance. Whatever official rhetoric might be employed to justify the creation of the Woodhill control unit, the reality is that it will be used against those prisoners considered the most articulate and focused in their opposition to the institutionalised injustices of the prison system. The Woodhill unit will exist principally to maintain the good order and discipline of the system by segregating prison leaders and subjecting them to mental torture in an attempt to 'convert' them to the institutional interests of their gaolers, thereby eradicating their influence among other prisoners.

The Wakefield control unit 'experiment' failed, although while it operated it subjected certain prisoners to



horrendous levels of psychological brutality and, in the case of Michael Williams, a control unit prisoner who subsequently mounted a high profile legal action against the Home Office, left him mentally scarred for life.

The Woodhill unit will reintroduce those same methods in an atmosphere of official secrecy and denial, as well as a social and political climate far more favourable to the brutalisation and maltreatment of prisoners.

DNA testing

In May the now widespread police practice of DNA-testing was extended into the prison system. The Criminal Evidence (Amendment) Act 1997 extends the power to take 'non-intimate body samples' (ie mouth swabs or body hair), by force if necessary, from people convicted of 'certain offences' before April 1995 - those convicted after that date will already have had samples taken on arrest or conviction.

DNA-testing has been publicly hyped up as a foolproof scientific method of identifying heinous criminals such as child-killers and rapists; however, some cases have already proven that it is far from fool-proof and in the long list of offences for which DNA-samples may be taken, sexual offences do not even appear until page two. Prisoners whose samples are currently being taken include those who have committed burglary, grievous or actual bodily harm, threats to kill, carrying a firearm with criminal intent, and arson. The aim is to add them to the national database of DNA profiles.

Full Sutton

Charles Emerson, solicitor, represents several prisoners who were present at the 20 January 'disturbance' at Full Sutton. He is extremely keen to hear, either directly or via their own solicitors, from any prisoner who was at Full Sutton on that day and whose personal property has been damaged. Mr Emerson can be contacted at Freedman, Hamilton and Emerson, 22 John Street, Sunderland SR1 1JJ, telephone 0191 567 1562.

Drugs in prison - all you ever wanted to know but never dared ask

The Anarchist Black Cross has produced a special edition of its paper *Taking Liberties*, entirely dedicated to the subject of drugs in prison. A series of articles, mostly by serving prisoners, deal with how drug addicts are punished by the prison system while drug dealers are rewarded and the expensive farce of Mandatory Drug Testing. Highly recommended reading, available from ABC, 121 Raiton Road, London SE24, price 60p including postage - free to prisoners.

Locking 'em up young

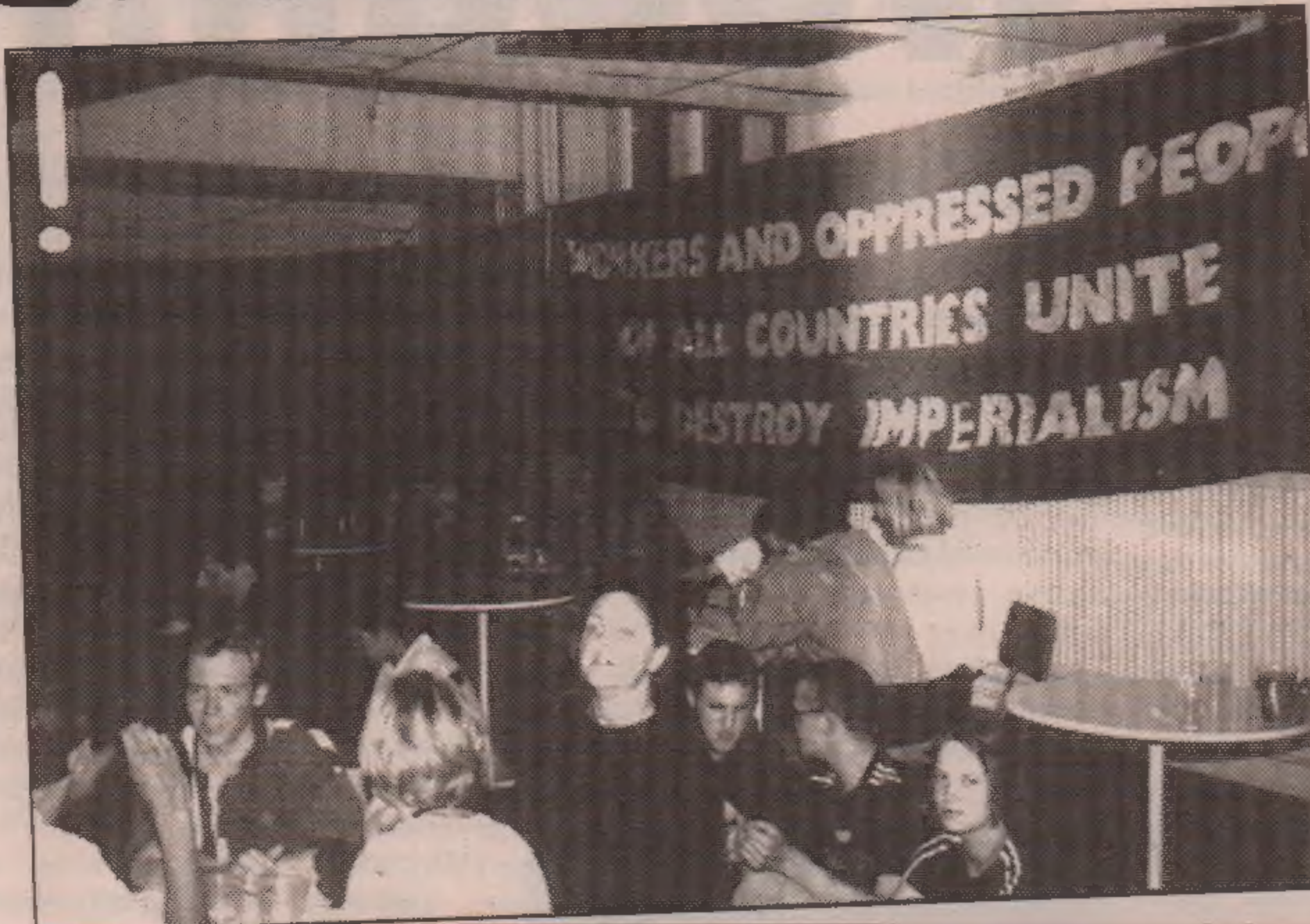
Jack Straw has given the go-ahead for the first 'children's prison' to house 12-14 year olds at Cookham Wood in Kent. The prison, which is already half built, is conveniently situated next to Cookham Wood women's prison and Rochester men's; presumably to facilitate the locking up of entire families who transgress Straw's 'Zero Tolerance' policies.

JOIN OUR frfi READERS' GROUPS!

There is a task ahead of us all: we have to organise collectively to defend ourselves, our conditions of life, and the condition of the planet. Socialism is our only way forward, and it up to us to make it happen. How we are going to do it will be the focal point of discussions in the FRFI Readers Groups which we are launching this summer.

The socialist and working class movement has suffered enormous setbacks since the 1980s. The defeat of the Irish hungerstrike in 1981 was followed by that of the miners' strike of 1984/85. On an international scale, imperialism was able to re-assert its domination by the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies on oppressed nations throughout the world. Then came the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Some proclaimed the end of history – the final triumph of capitalism.

But history is there for us to make. Both humanity and the planet it inhabits are being destroyed – by imperialism. Its representatives in the media and in the Labour government tell us we cannot resist the global labour market it has created, a market that means unemployment for millions, underemployment in the form of casualisation and part-time working for millions more. We say that not only can we resist, but it is our duty to. We have to work to create a new socialist movement, one based on the oppressed and exploited working class. Such a movement must have its own set of principles, its guiding ideology – Marxism. This is why we are setting up the FRFI Readers' Groups – to bring Marxism to a new generation of activists.



FRFI Readers' Groups are open to readers and supporters of our newspaper. They will primarily discuss articles in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* and will provide an education in Marxism to all who attend. They will take place fortnightly, and our aim is to make them informative, lively and sociable so that everyone can participate. We are setting them up in the following cities:

Birmingham
Blackburn
Brighton
Bristol
Dundee
Edinburgh
Leicester
Lincoln
London
Manchester

**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

**General Election
A general fraud**



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ORGANISE!**

**FIGHT RACISM!
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**RULING CLASS
back in power**



**ORGANISE
the fightback**

Fighting capitalist lies...

Forthcoming Readers Group Meetings

Blackburn: Fox & Grapes, New Preston Rd, 7.30pm, every other Monday. First meetings 11 and 25 August, 8 September. For further information contact 01254 679605.

Leicester: St Peter's Tenants Association, 112 Melbourne Rd, Highfields. 1.30pm every other Saturday. Next meetings: 9 and 23 August, 6 and 20 September.

Lincoln: Regular meetings from end of August. For further information, contact 01400 230151.

London: Next meeting Wednesday 20 August in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, 7.30pm. Discussion on Ireland. Following meetings are every other Wednesday, 3 and 17 September.

Manchester: Start September. For details, write to FRFI, Dept 4, 1 Newton St, Manchester.

For information on meetings in other cities or to help set one up in your area:

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Phone us on 0171-837-1688

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LETTERS

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Political prisoner's life in danger

The life of Ana Lucia Gelabert, a US political prisoner at the penitentiary of Gatesville, Texas, is in danger. Comrade Gelabert, a professional engineer and scientist, has been unjustly imprisoned for more than 13 years. Why does the US government hate this woman so much? Because of her revolutionary ideas and support for liberation struggles in the Third

World. A few years ago a fellow inmate saved her life after prison guards wrapped her in bed sheets and tried to suffocate her. Earlier this year she survived an attempt on her life by a gang of inmates, in view of a guard, in the prison bathroom.

The prison authorities in Texas, with the active participation of a medical doctor, are deliberately misclassifying certain prisoners as a punishment, so they will be assigned to jobs hazardous to their own health. (Ana Lucia has suffered from asthma all her life but has been 'reclassified' as not suffering from it and ordered to work with harmful chemicals.) They are also using a gang of inmates to

terrorise other prisoners. Clinton talks about human rights violations in the jails of Cuba or China, but looks the other way when crimes are committed in his own gulag or against prisoners of war in his own backyard (Peru and Latin America). Below is a statement from Comrade Gelabert:

'Help in this prison is needed urgently. It has been obvious for some time that high ranking officials are scheming to murder me. The likely vehicle is a violent and extremely vicious gang that these officials own and operate in this jail, to do their dirty work in exchange for numerous small favours (eg sex and drugs). Your help is needed. – Ana Lucia Gelabert, #384484, Rt 4 Box 800, Gatesville, TX 76528, USA.'

Please send letters of complaint to Warden Pamela Baggett at the above address and to Wayne Scott, Director – TCJD, PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342, USA.

SUPPORTERS OF ANA LUCIA GELABERT

Hong Kong's return welcomed in Taiwan

The return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule on 1 July will have considerable impact in Taiwan, the only Chinese

province not under the control of the government in Beijing. The anti-communist authorities in Taiwan still ban all direct transport, mail and telephone links with the Chinese mainland. However, a great deal of trade, travel and communication actually takes place between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits via Hong Kong, which, under British rule, could be considered a third or neutral territory. Faced with the reality that they will now have to deal directly with the People's Republic of China authorities, Taiwan's rulers have been trying to avoid the issue and discouraged any celebration of Hong Kong's return.

Despite this negative atmosphere, about 2,000 patriotic people attended a 'Say goodbye to colonialism' evening in Taipei organised by the China Reunification League and the China Tide Foundation. Although Beijing rock singer Cui Jian was not allowed to come to Taiwan to play at the gala, the crowds were still treated to spectacular song and dance acts by a traditional Chinese drum group and a Taiwan aboriginal dance ensemble. Aboriginal singer Hu Defu was the star performer with his powerful, soulful voice. A number of speeches were made welcoming the departure of British colonialism from Chinese soil and expressing a wish for peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the mainland before too long. Many of the speakers condemned Taiwan's 'president' Li Tenghui for cosyng up to US and Japanese imperialism while obstructing China's national reunification process. These

comments were welcomed by the audience, who jeered whenever Li's name was mentioned.

The same evening, organisations supporting independence for Taiwan held an outdoor rally nearby. The fact that it had as its main slogan 'Say no to China', in English, can be taken as an indication of what kind of US-backed elite was behind the event. The core organisation was carried out by the Presbyterian church. Despite the massive resources invested by the organisers, including free transport, free t-shirts and free lunch boxes, the turnout was far short of what the organisers had claimed it would be. Despite professing to be the only ones who love Taiwan, the participants left behind them mounds of empty lunch boxes, discarded leaflets, headbands and other trash, showing scant regard for Taiwan's already imperiled environment.

Sunday morning saw a march and motorcade demonstration called by the Chinese People's United Front and attended by members of the China Reunification League, the New Party, Labour Party and a number of other small parties and groups. It was attended by several hundred reunification supporters, again welcoming Hong Kong's return. Despite the length of the route in very hot weather and the advanced age of many of the marchers, a celebratory atmosphere prevailed as the participants looked forward to a great day in China's history.

JONATHAN COHEN
Taiwan, China

UNISON's Single Status deal

Britain's biggest union, which dragged its feet in supporting and eventually abandoned the Hillingdon strikers has shown considerable energy and zeal in promoting its Single Status deal with local government employers.

This so-called historic deal abolishes the sectional division within national bargaining between manual and administrative, personnel, technical and clerical staff (APT&C). In return for a pay deal very marginally weighted towards lower-paid workers, national agreements are to be scrapped and handed over to local councils for job re-evaluation. No surprise that these councils are overwhelmingly Labour and that even Tory Bromley Council are jumping with joy at this capitulation. Ominously, the whole Single Status deal fits into Gordon Brown's two-year commitment to Tory spending limits, with reductions in the weekly hours for manual workers postponed until 1999.

As I argued at my local union branch, this deal is nothing short of surrender disguised as victory. The record of Labour councils in carrying out savage cuts in services and employment will continue under New Labour. By accepting Single Status, UNISON delivers us up for slaughter.

MICHAEL MCGREGOR
Scotland

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MEETINGS AND EVENTS

25th anniversary of the
International Wages for
Housework Campaign

Conference:
SILVER ANNIVERSARY –
GOING FOR GOLD

Saturday 26 July, all day.

International speakers: Clotil Walcott (Trinidad & Tobago), Andaiye (Guyana), Manju Gardia (India), Phoebe Jones and Margaret Prescod (US), Yolanda Benito and Sara Williams (Spain) and others. Launch of *Disability and violence: the cash connection* by WinVisible: women with visible and invisible disabilities.

Tel: 0171 482 2496 (minicom/voice) or 0161 344 0758 for venue details.

Organised by
Wages for Housework Campaign

KURDISTAN

It's time for peace – end the war

Join the peace train from Brussels on 26 August to Istanbul via Cologne, Mainz and Sofia to Istanbul and then to Diyarbakir on 1 September, International Anti-War Day, for a big peace festival to demand a peaceful, political solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey.

Contact the peace train co-ordination office, c/o Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London N4 1HD or tel/fax: 0181 802 4017 or 0181 340 5867

LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

RCG withdrawal from IWCA

IWCA letter

It was interesting to see FRFI's position on the forthcoming election (FRFI April) 'Don't vote – organise!' The Revolutionary Communist Group has a long and honourable record of opposition to the Labour Party, opposition that began before such a position became widespread.

It is therefore with regret that we have heard of your decision to withdraw from the Independent Working Class Association. That there has been no formal notification of this decision from you is in itself surprising, given your participation in the IWCA since its inception. It is difficult therefore to take up any arguments you have against it without knowing what they are. Nevertheless, we would ask you to reconsider this decision and we are writing to FRFI so that your readers may be made aware of this change of attitude and debate the issues it raises.

The IWCA founding document was printed in FRFI (December/January 1995/6). It was – and remains – a genuine attempt to break with many of the practices and views of the British left. It was explicitly anti-Labour Party and sought to unite all leftist forces around this view. But it went further: it argued that the left had failed to reach out to the working class and to work within working class communities to encourage self-organisation. It set this task in the context of a Labour Party which had abandoned all pretence of addressing the needs of the working class, a 'conservative left' which miserably tailed the Labour Party and a radical right which would not be slow to exploit the political vacuum created in working class areas hard hit by the crisis.

The RCG accepted this view and endorsed the IWCA, saying: 'The strength of the IWCA document is that it... consciously seeks to break with a past that has abysmally failed' (*ibid*). The IWCA spent many months discussing and debating its standpoint in an effort to include all those forces who wished to participate. Despite this – often painfully laborious – process, several of the initial sponsors withdrew. Usually, as the RCG is now doing, they failed to say why they were leaving. Perhaps the task being set for the IWCA was too difficult for them to contemplate, requiring as it did a break with the habitual practices of the British left. For it required a break with sectarian practices in which the building of one organisation was placed above the needs of the working class movement. It required a break with the sectarian outlook which judged the success of its work by how many papers it had sold or other leftists defeated in an argument, and instead judged its success by whether it could build roots amongst that section of the working class which was most politically isolated and disenfranchised. Finding out and responding to their concerns, encouraging them to organise around these concerns and, in the process, building roots for a socialist movement – these are the



Organising within working class communities: picket of PolyGram in defence of Nigel Cook

keys for serious socialists.

This is hardly a new outlook for socialists. It is, rather, a rediscovery of what was clear to Marx and Engels and remains clear to revolutionaries in most parts of the world. Engels wrote in 1896 of political organisations of his day: 'It is very characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race and their peculiar development that... the people who more or less have the correct theory as to the dogmatic side of it become a mere sect because they cannot conceive that living theory of action, of working with the working class at every possible stage of its development, otherwise than as a collection of dogmas... recited like a conjurer's formula or a Catholic prayer.' It seems that, in this regard at least, not much has changed in the past 100 years.

The left movement in Britain has never been so weak and never been so isolated from these social forces which can accomplish change. There are three possible reactions to this: first, to decide that all is lost and retreat into that cynicism and pessimism that has gripped many former leftists; two, to carry on as before in the peculiar belief that what has hitherto failed to work will miraculously do so now; three, attempt to connect socialist views with working class communities about the matters which concern them. The IWCA is an attempt at the third of these. If the RCG has differences, then it should fight for its views within the IWCA and allow them to be discussed. For it is a fact that for the whole of its period of participation it did not raise any serious differences of opinion with either the political project or its method of being carried out. If it had differences, then why did it not raise them? If it did not have differences, why did it leave? If it has left, why does it not now publicly state its reasons for doing so?

The only time disagreement arose with the RCG was when, during a long day of leafleting in the East End, FRFI comrades were asked not to sell their paper. This was discussed at the next meeting and it was made clear that this was a tactical position. All those present accepted that it was inappropriate for the IWCA to simply appear as yet another group of leftist paper sellers and that those involved had to exercise some self-restraint in these matters. The IWCA leaflet being given out that day had been agreed at a meeting at which the RCG was present. The leaflet represented an attempt to reach out to people who were fed up with local Labour councils and warned of what Labour would do in government. That was the aim of the event rather than a paper sale by various left groups. Surely you can see that when and where you sell your paper is a tactical question – sometimes people must be approached in a more cautious and limited way. It is a sad fact that the left does not have a constituency – it must build it by demonstrating its commitment to working class communities. In FRFI's endorsement of the IWCA, you said: 'Dogmatic left slogans and conceptions have not been a means of approaching the working class, but a substitute for doing so. Had the activities of the left succeeded in getting a single gain for the working class, its reputation might now be something other than that of dinosaurs and eccentrics.' Has your view now changed?

It is not enough merely to say 'Don't vote – organise'. We also have to roll up our sleeves and translate the deep alienation felt in sections of the working class into active political opposition to this system.

DOREEN WEBSTER
IWCA

The RCG replies

Thank you for your letter. The leadership of the RCG has discussed your letter and we, of course, agree with your points on the Labour Party and the left's isolation from the working class. We have not changed our position on these questions, as you will know as an FRFI reader.

We affiliated to the IWCA as an organisation – a Marxist-Leninist organisation – which is prepared to join initiatives of other left organisations (and has done so in the past) which will further our mutual aims and activities, and promote discussion on the way forward for communists. Affiliation to the IWCA was not an attempt to dissolve the RCG into another organisation, which seems to have been the agenda of some groups within the IWCA.

The matters you raise at the end of your letter are therefore not incidental or unimportant questions: for the RCG, sales of our newspaper and the promotion of our standpoint are vital. We also regard the freedom to sell FRFI and our other publications and to promote our views as fundamental to democracy. We have fought numerous 'old left' organisations and alliances on this question. They also argued that this was simply a 'tactical' question, when in fact they wanted to ensure that our communist standpoint was not associated with their activities.

This seems also to be true of the IWCA – you argue 'sometimes people must be approached in a more cautious and limited way'. This must mean that you think working

class people would be deterred from association with the IWCA if it was clear that communists are among its affiliates. This is, we assume, what you mean by a 'tactical question'. The removal of names of affiliated organisations from the leaflet which RCG comrades helped to distribute is, we also assume, part of this tactic.

Needless to say, we disagree with it. We do not believe that such obfuscation is either necessary or successful, and we do not accept decisions that we cannot sell our newspaper.

We hope that the IWCA's project to organise as communists in working class communities is successful. We will be happy to join in activities organised by the IWCA where the RCG is welcome and where we can promote our ideas and sell our literature.

We did, as you know, raise points at IWCA meetings and at meetings with Red Action comrades about democracy within the organisation. Unfortunately these points went unheard. Perhaps this is also the reason why affiliated organisations, which were expected to 'bow out', have not notified the IWCA of their reasons.

RCG Political Committee

Unknown to the RCG until very recently, an exchange took place between the IWCA and the anarchist *Black Flag* in mid-1996. On the letters page of issue 208, the author defended his/her position against IWCA criticism and wrote: 'Representatives of the IWCA seem to be making it all things to all people, such as telling comrades in Liverpool and the North East not to worry about the RCG and other stalinist elements, as they'll be sidelined once it gets going. What are you telling the RCG?' Something completely different, is the answer.

SACKED

for fighting poverty pay

Within hours of seeing the last issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, the management of M&S Packaging suspended me from work and two days later sacked me.

Production manager Richard Ware contacted me at home and said 'You are suspended and we want you to come in on Wednesday because Mr Munn [the administrator] wants to have a word with you.' When I asked why, he simply replied 'Mr Pye [a manager of the multinational PolyGram] does not want you on his soil'.

I contacted the administrator's office immediately and asked if I could have my Union officer present at the meeting, only to be told by a Mrs Coardingly that: 'it was not fair on Mr Munn to spring it on him at such short notice, that you want to have your legal representative present', as he 'did not have enough time to arrange his legal team'.

I reminded Mrs Coardingly that I had been woken, having just worked a 12-hour night shift, and without any notice told I was suspended from work and that Mr Munn wanted to speak to me. She would not tell me why he wanted this meeting.

The next day I reported my suspension to my union. Jim Bowie, District Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, faxed Mr Munn a letter asking why I had been suspended and, if there had been any allegations or complaints of bad conduct against me, could he tell us what they were. Jim Bowie also asked if he could be present at the meeting.

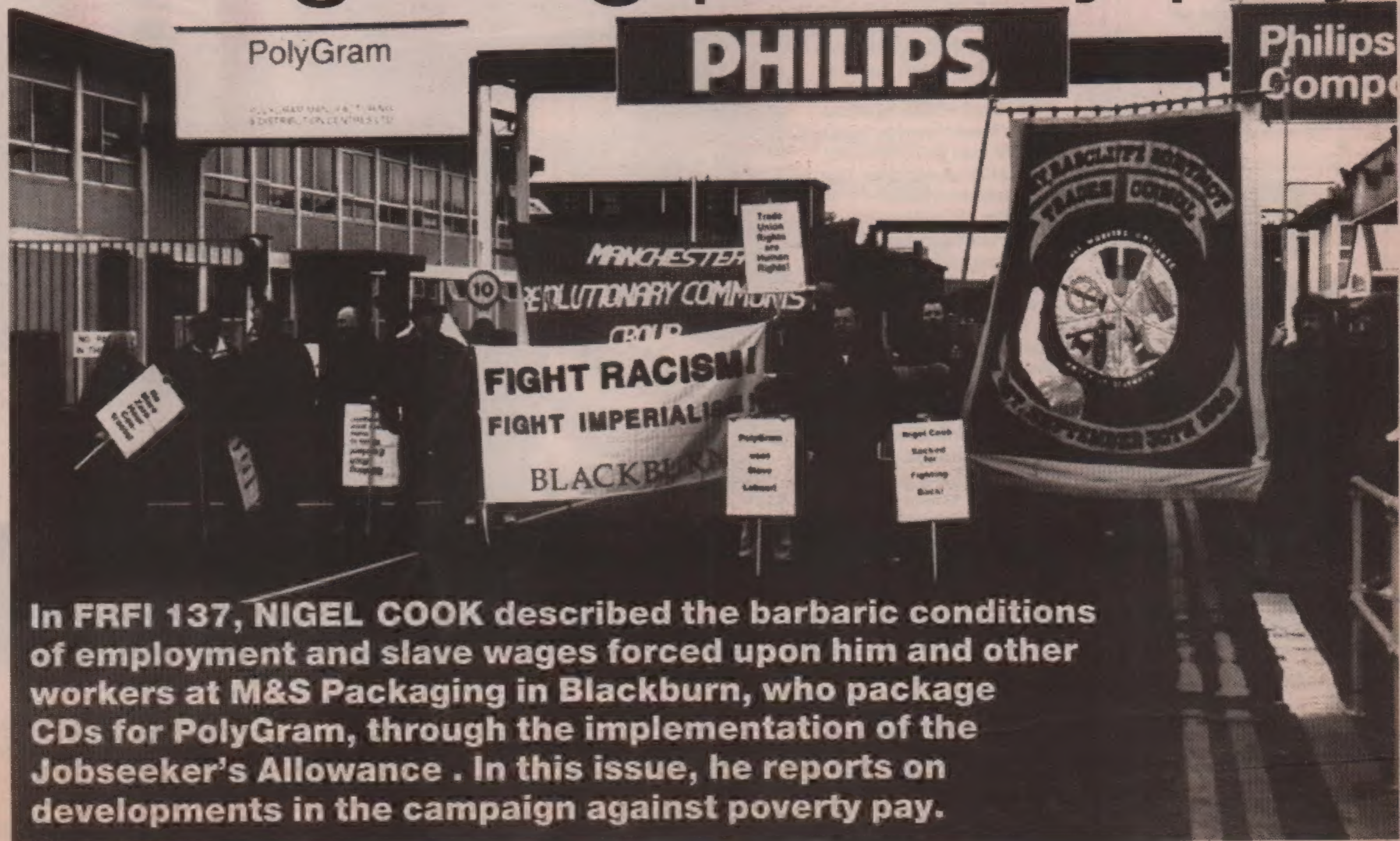
The next morning, the day of the meeting, Mr Munn phoned Jim Bowie. He did not offer any reasons why I had been suspended, told him that the meeting was just an 'amicable chat' and after some persuasion grudgingly told Jim he could come.

Present at the 'amicable chat' were Mr Munn, Mr McCarthy (M&S director), Jim Bowie and me. Mr Munn started by arrogantly saying that there was nothing to compel him to allow my union officer to be present and that I should be grateful for him being so good-natured. Mr Munn then outlined his role as administrator: describing PolyGram as the 'sole customer', he emphasised that he did not want his 'job made more difficult' by someone 'stirring up trouble'.

Mr McCarthy, clutching his copy of FRFI, then started quoting from highlighted parts of my article. He said that my article was not 'wholly accurate' because whilst it correctly mentioned the closed circuit cameras in the works and canteen areas 'it did not mention the cameras outside' and the fact that 'employees need permission to go to the toilet is for health and safety reasons'!

It was at this point that Mr Munn politely interrupted McCarthy, probably to spare us all this embarrassingly pathetic sight, and said that it was his intention that during the course of this meeting he would sack me. I asked him for the reason for my sacking, to which he proudly boasted that 'current legislation is such that I do not have to give any reason for dismissal'. He refused to give any reasons when asked again by my union representative.

The following day the union faxed a letter to both Munn and McCarthy asking for the reason for my sacking. To date neither of them has replied. This did not stop Munn informing the dole I had been 'dismissed for misconduct', in an effort to get my benefit stopped. However, when I



In FRFI 137, NIGEL COOK described the barbaric conditions of employment and slave wages forced upon him and other workers at M&S Packaging in Blackburn, who package CDs for PolyGram, through the implementation of the Jobseeker's Allowance. In this issue, he reports on developments in the campaign against poverty pay.

told them that Munn had refused to give me a reason for my dismissal and I had been sacked for union activity, they let my claim go through.

My union submitted an application to the Industrial Tribunal on the grounds that I had clearly been sacked for my union activities. The day before my hearing, we received notification from the tribunal that the hearing could not progress because of a legal technicality. Apparently, under Section 11(3) of the Insolvency Act 1986, during the period for which an Administration Order is in force (as is the present situation with M&S) '... (d) No other proceedings and no execution or other legal process may be commenced or continued, and no distress may be levied, against the Company or its property except with the consent of the Administrator or the leave of the Court and subject (where the Court gives leave) to such terms as aforesaid.'

The union's legal advisers were unaware of this fact, and it was the solicitors acting for McCarthy and Munn who brought it to the attention of the chairman of the Industrial Tribunal. The chairman then 'stayed' my hearing for four weeks.

The union's national legal department, having assessed my case, have now appointed a local firm of solicitors, at the cost of £2,000, to seek 'leave of the Court'. My case is to be heard on 25 July.

The solicitors have said that the case could well end up in the House of Lords as there is, to their knowledge, no legal precedent. As it stands, this legal loophole effectively allows employers to sack workers without reasons, regardless of length of service, and the same sacked workers have no immediate redress to an Industrial Tribunal.

How PolyGram conducts business - ssh!

In the preparation of my case the union have now obtained a copy of a letter from a PolyGram manager, dated the same day as my suspension, that clearly instructs M&S to keep me off 'PolyGram's premises'. The letter, referring to the FRFI article, attempts to distance PolyGram from the appalling conditions at M&S when it reminds McCarthy that 'terms and conditions you offer to employees are your responsibility'. It goes on to state their concerns about people's 'impression of how we conduct business'.

The campaign

I contacted the GMB union convenor at PolyGram, Barry Eatough, and told him of my sacking; he agreed to meet with me and other M&S workers at the union offices to discuss ways in which PolyGram workers could help improve conditions at M&S. He never showed up and has refused to answer our telephone messages and letters. It became obvious that any effective campaigning against the increasing tide of sweatshop firms paying crap wages would have to be built by those directly affected. It cannot depend on those workers who enjoy relatively good working conditions and wages.

So I, along with members of my union, local supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Group and other progressives have formed a campaign calling for my reinstatement. Other demands of the campaign are Fight Poverty Pay!, No to Slave Labour! and End Casualisation! The campaign has two priorities to win support: writing to union branches and other organisations and individuals and campaigning on the streets and in the communities.

The response from organisations so far has been good, with many union branches, trades councils and other groups affiliating to the campaign, sending donations and inviting speakers to their meetings. And our street work has been very well received by the thousands of people forced to work in lousy jobs. At our weekly street stall in Blackburn town centre we regularly meet people telling us of their experiences. One woman, a care assistant, was being paid £2.50 per hour and another guy was being paid £1.50 per hour. We have been told of a cleaning firm in Preston paying just £1.00 per hour. There are over 50 job agencies servicing Blackburn and the surrounding area. We also leaflet outside the JobCentre, highlighting the role of the Employment Service in forcing JSA claimants into appalling jobs.

We hold regular campaign meetings in the central library, where we encourage everyone who supports the aims of the campaign to get involved. Unfortunately, the local Socialist Workers Party and New Communist Party have not attended any of our events. We held a very successful picket outside PolyGram, to publicise their use of sweatshop firm M&S Packaging. More than 30 people attended, including representatives of Bury Unemployed Workers Centre, Preston Radical, trades councils and various union branches. The picket received good coverage in the local press.

The campaign has agreed that we should use any means necessary to publicise the scandalous work conditions that are now becoming the norm in this country. So I raised the issue of my sacking and the growth of racketeering job agencies with the local MP, Jack Straw. I met with him

at a recent surgery and explained my situation; when I mentioned PolyGram, he expressed familiarity with the name. Perhaps he was already aware of the recent appointment of PolyGram Chief Executive Stuart Till as a co-chair of the government's Film Working Group. Film workers beware - zero hour contracts and poverty pay, coming your way soon!

Straw did say that he would write letters to M&S and PolyGram about my sacking, and that he believed a minimum wage would go some way towards curing the problem of the job agency racket. He also promised to contact Ian McCartney (Labour Minister for the Labour Market) and inform me of Labour's plans to combat casualisation. We wait to see if he keeps his word.

**Next Campaign meeting 7.30pm
Wednesday 13 August,
Blackburn Central Library.**

**REINSTATE NIGEL COOK!
FIGHT POVERTY PAY!
NO TO SLAVE LABOUR!
END CASUALISATION!**

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN!

Unemployed/Casual workers £1.00
Other Individuals £5.00
TUs/organisations £15.00

Name _____

Address _____

Cheques payable to 'Reinstate Nigel Cook

Campaign' c/o RNCC 40-42 Abbey Street,

Accrington, Lancs, BB5 1EB. Tel: 01254

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